

**SHORT STORIES FOR LIFE: IMPLICATIONS OF THE  
CANONISATION OF THE ZIMBABWEAN STORY-TELLING  
TRADITION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELE CTED  
ZIMBABWEAN SHORT STORIES**

**BY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**DECEMBER 2016**

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CANONISATION OF THE ZIMBABWEAN STORY-TELLING  
TRADITION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED  
ZIMBABWEAN SHORT STORIES**

**by**

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY**

**in the subject of**

**AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**December 2016**

## DECLARATION

Student Number 5186-544-0

I, Shereck Mbwera, declare that **Short Stories For Life: Implications of the Canonisation of The Zimbabwean Story-telling Tradition, With Special Reference to Selected Zimbabwean Short Stories** is my work and that the sources used or quoted have been indicated by means of complete references.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 07 December 2016

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am greatly indebted to my promoters, Professor T. M. Sengani and Professor D. E. Mutasa who went beyond the limit of patience to work out something meaningful out of my amateurish ideas and views. They provided diligence and rigour in their feedbacks which shaped and directed the trajectory taken by this study. They also crossed the bound of duty to delve into my challenges of social nature, especially when the project was almost guillotined by financial and other constraints beyond my control. Thank you for providing intellectual nurture in both formal and informal capacities. Now the prize belongs to me while the debts are all chalked on the wall.

I reserve the best to University of South Africa (UNISA) for granting me a Bursary that financed the project. A research of this magnitude could not be achieved without this funding. Thank you for making me realise my potentials.

I am deeply obliged to the friendship and invaluable support of Dr Charles Tembo, senior lecturer at Midlands State University (MSU), who responded to a questionnaire, thoroughly edited my final thesis and made useful comments and suggestions. *Nokuti imi matungidza mwenje wangu saka nemi, Comrade, tichavamba hondo. Nemi tichadarika rusvingo* (For thou hast light my candle, therefore, by thee, Comrade, I have run through a troop. With your camaraderie I have leapt over a wall). Professor W. Chigidi of MSU and Professor I. Muwati, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Zimbabwe, you are marvellous. Thank you for your stunning data gathering and editing support. May the Almighty do to you as you have done to me? My thesis has also recuperated the best out of fellow colleagues, editors, reviewers, publishers and authors who contributed insightful data through interviews and questionnaires. No material reward can duly repay you.

Special acknowledgements go to my mother, wife and children for both material and emotional support you rendered when I needed you most. I count my blessings on you because you are always there for me.

## DEDICATION

I bestow the success of this thesis:

to my late father, Simon Mbwera, from whose fatherhood I inherited not only the name, but the blood, whose progeny I pass on, both, in the old ways and in words.

To the motherhood of two nonpareil women in my life, Angeline, who made me a child and Maude, the one with whom I make others.

To the childhood of Precious, Opal Andrew, Pretty Patricia and Blessing Isheunesu, all of whom I pray, should take after me.

To God, “For he spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalms 33:9).

*Mwari wakataura kamwe chete: ndakanzwa kaviri: kuti simba nderaMwari*

*Netsitsivo ndedzenyu, Ishe; Nokuti munoitira munhu mumwe nomumwe sezvaakabata.*

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard; that power belongs unto God.

Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work. (Psalms 62:11-12).

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the myth of the surrogate power of canonicity by exposing the condition of liminality of the Zimbabwean short story genre within African literary canon. Building on the hypothesis that canonisation distorts literature the study postulates that literary canon produce predictable biases in construing the position of the short story. It fossilises and condenses the marginal genres to the extent that the existing canon repertoire hardly recognises them. The peripheral but de facto canon of the short story genre entertains a strong relationship of heteronomy to the mainstream/central canon. This thesis studies this relationship which determines canon formation within the African literary systems. It challenges the prevailing status quo in which the short story is polarised against other literary modes. The polarity creates a charged diametric force between the presumed canonical genres and the supposedly non-canonical short story mess. What lacks in this equation of conflicts is a sense of revival, reformation and continuity of the short story canon. The marginality of the short story canon is predicated on factors external to the genre itself, such as the influence of colonial institutions, collegiate institutions and publishers on writers. These factors pervade the dialectics of canonical marginality of the genre. The study, which argues that there is no unanimity on theory of canon, proposes *Africulture*, as both a theory and praxis of Afrocentricity, to function as an arbiter of short story literary reputation and consecration. The research reveres the autonomous value of African story-telling tradition which withstood the test and movement of time, in the process, surviving not only the historical-cum-cultural threat of colonial loss and canonical displacement, but also the throes and will power of new media and digital technologies. The ascendancy of the electronic short story genre to canonical status remains questionable. Critical controversies abound about the canonicity of electronic literature. The study employs Technauriture as a theoretical model for rethinking the transcendence of the electronic short story canon. The study concludes that, by virtue of its resilience, the short story ought to be treated as a wholesale and independent genre, worth of full scale appreciation.

## Key words

Africulture, Technauriture, short story, Canonicity, African literary canon, cybernetic literature, e-short story,

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background/Context statement of purpose

*Zimbabwe, indeed, is a short story country. The canonical trendsetters of Zimbabwean literature escaped the throttling grip, noose and net of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau via the short story. The brevity and incisiveness of the short story has allowed many a Zimbabwean to capture the defining moments in Zimbabwean history with considerable ease. (Ruby Magosvongwe, 23 October, 2008, Unofungei? Fungai blog)*

Canonisation distorts literature and introduces predictable biases in construing it, fossilises its subject matter and condenses its study to an inappropriate simulation of the canonical rubric. Asked what constitutes the literary canon, scholarly opinions are, quite often, divided by pleas to unstable definitions that seek to render the genre in question unsystematic. Such is the fate of the African short story in general and particularly the Zimbabwean short story. The habit of close observations and cautious definitions of the Zimbabwean indigenous African languages literature, provided by the state agents; Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau (SRLB) of 1953, the Division of African Education and the Native Affairs Department, fashioned a dangerous scholarly disposition that relegated the short story to the footnote of the novel. The agents' underhand policies influenced the writers and their art, the school, college and university curricular on Zimbabwean literature to be biased towards the novel. In seeking consensus with the agents' canonical rubric characteristic Zimbabwean literary formations were distorted. The distortions inherent in the canonical tradition deposed the short story from its prime literary space and replaced it with the extended novel. This is a serious attitude similar in outlook to the cultural situation which caused Pluto's (in Ferrari, 1989) ambivalence towards poetry and the poets whom he asserts ought to be banned from the Republic of *Kallipolis*, the ideal city.

Unfortunately, the background influencing the pioneering short story corpus is glossed over, ignored or over-looked; hence the short story gets subsumed under the novel. Critics, such as Riemenschneider, (1989), Chiwome, (1996, 2002) and Muhwati (2006) merge the short story with the novel. Chirere in his copious reviews to embryonic short story anthologies assails

the genre without trepidation for what he considers lack of those fine aesthetics presumed to define art in literary criticism. Blinded by their pursuit for strict artistic functional interpretations, these domiciled critics stress on naive utilitarian aspects of Zimbabwean prose that relegate the short story to the level of the insignificant *other*, and vilifies it as a footnote to the novel. Short story critiques unfairly dismiss the Zimbabwean short story as an invented tradition unworthy of serious scholarly deliberations as compared to the extended novel. As a concentrated form of narrative prose fiction, the Zimbabwean short story has, therefore, been theorised through the traditional model of the extended novel. As a result, it has been attributed simulated sensibilities by critics who jump on the band wagon of interweaving its analysis with the novel. This integrationist approach has rendered the short story dysfunctional and non-existent as a genre. This study repudiates the integrationist approach by examining the teleological development of the short story to escape and pose a challenge to the deliberate critical fallacy of circumscribing its potency.

Interestingly, the publication of Chiwome's short story anthology, *Masango Mavi* (1996), (Fruitless Forests) marked an unprecedented upsurge of the short story writing in Zimbabwean literature that threatens to virtually drown the novel, henceforth, ending an interregnum of the short story. Since the short story has worked its own logic to evade this throttling grip of extinction, its resurgence necessitates a review of its theorisation that accords it its distinct place within African literature free from a generalised synthesis. Thus the question of the primacy of the short story has become widespread.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

The edicts of '*othering*' or exclusivity of the short story transposed on the Zimbabwean literary canon by Rhodesian colonial policies affected the orientation of Zimbabwean literature, particularly in Shona and IsiNdebele. Zimbabwean literature, per se, is rocked by the problem of defining its prose genres. This confounded crisis of definition is phenomenal in most schools, colleges and University Departments of African literature today, the continent over, where the novel and the short story are juxtaposed in analytical discourses.

This research, therefore, problematises the essence of canonicity in African literature. The focus is on the mega problem of categorisation of prose literary genres, specifically debriefing the viability of the tropes that define these fictional modes. Thus, in decolonisation diktats, is canonisation necessary for African/Zimbabwean literature? As a question for a way forward; how far have the stakeholders gone in changing colonial curricular in universities and other learning institutions? The content may have changed. We have realised a shift from Europhile theoretical approaches (such as literary criticism) to Afro-centred approaches, but have the models and formats really changed?

### **1.3. Aim of the study**

This study aims to formulate a mutually obtrusive paradigm of analysis of the short story that situates its centrality and primacy within Zimbabwean prose discourses, irrespective of whether the creative impulse assumes an oral or written form. The scope of this thesis, then, is to reflect the vicissitudes of the exclusion from the mainstream Shona literature of the short story tradition created by the canonical subjectivities of colonial educational politics. The research endeavours to explicate the problematics of Zimbabwean literary canon and canonical culture vis-à-vis the short story genre. It seeks to debrief the complexities inherent in the interplay between the oral, print and the multi-media forms of the short story construction and production. The study, therefore, endeavours to make a critical exegesis of the facets and formations of the short story genre that can be considered the defining rudiments of the Zimbabwean literary canon. In order to harness the imperatives of this aim the research achieves a triad of objective functionality.

### **1.4 Objectives of Study**

1. To explore the folkloristic nature of the short story convention in order to expound the Shona oral folktale as the antecedent of the contemporary short story.
2. To explicate the implications of canonisation of Zimbabwean literature in order to determine the extent to which canonisation distorts art

3. To trace the trajectory and teleological mutation of the short story genre from its earliest oral form through the written to the modern electronic version (the e-story,) as it evaded canonist extinction to retain a historical continuum for its existence.

### **1.5 Research questions**

In order to redress the misconceptions inherent in canonisation of Zimbabwean prose fictional genres, (and by extension, African literary canon) this study, principally, questions whether or not canonisation is necessary for African Literature. What obtains when a literary culture becomes canonical? Does the process of canonisation not segregate officious artefacts that [must] culturally define a people's art? These questions are imperative for the researcher's quest for reflection on the following topical issues within Zimbabwean literature: Is the sudden resurgence of the short story in the recent years in preparation for the longer narrative, (the extended novel) or is it in defiance of it? Does not this phenomenal upsurge spawn seismic shift or profound transformation in the orientation of Zimbabwean literature? Could it not be an attempt by the genre to regain its contested terrain: re-oracisation of its de-oracised tradition in order to claim its own space within African literature? Could it not be ideal to consider the short story as a stand-alone genre independent of the conventions of the novel? Critics agree in principle that the genre has received relatively scant attention than the novel. Do not the canonical policies and culture validate the genre's skewed stratification by sacrificing the merits of its superstructure?

### **1.6 Justification of research**

Previous literary studies paid very scant attention to the Zimbabwean short story as a distinct genre. The predominant critical works by prominent critics have overlooked the importance of the genre. Energies have been expended on issues relating to thematic and historical concerns. Literature dealing with socio- economic, political and cultural relevance abounds, but work devoted specifically to the short story is very scarce. Research has focused on particular genres like the novel, drama and poetry. Rarely has the short story genre been

studied in its entirety, prompting Vambe, (2010) to decry what he regards as “poverty of theory in Zimbabwean literature.” This research, therefore, is a sincere attempt to fill the void inherent in analytical discourses of Zimbabwean prose literature. Agreeably, this is an area where exploratory research is still quite relevant.

This study is worthwhile because it makes a historical nous of the newsworthy signs of the metamorphosis of the Zimbabwe short story-telling tradition. It is a critical reflection of the prevalent scholarly conundrum linked to the authenticity of the short story as Zimbabwean art form. There is need, therefore, to redress the question of its canonicity and metamorphosis. This approach is imperative because, unlike earlier research, it locates this traditional cum modernist discourse, its content, function and form within the traditional mythologised historical past that inform it.

The main reason for choosing to focus on the short story is that the genre dates back to oral story-telling tradition which originally produced the most significant epics typical of the Shona art forms. The short story is as old as the Shona language itself. However, this earliest short oral narrative died a natural death with the inception of canonisation in 1954 under the auspices of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau. The short story art form was subjugated into the novelistic superstructure. Most university departments of African Literature across the globe, if not all, erroneously consider the novel as the paragon of literary creativity, with the short story as its apprenticeship. In contrast, this research contributes immensely to on-going debate on the trends and innovation of African literature by asserting the primacy of the short story. In as much as this project does not pioneer the short story study, it revalorises a revolution that challenges colonial categorisation of African literature. This re-engagement with the short story is imperative because it underscores the virtues that escalate the genre’s potency and autonomy. The research calls for re-orientation of school, college and university curricular with respect to the canonical taxonomy of literary fiction.

The present study adds weight to the on-going efforts to dispel the integrationist approach that lumps short story analysis with the novel. Therefore, the study re-works the combative coterie of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau (SRLB) which is responsible for the

pitiable universalism of Zimbabwean prose modes. This is an exciting challenge to the presumptions of the normative canon responsible for the genre's institutional aversion. The present study, therefore, is a search for, and a quest to situate the short story as the prime form of African literature whose pursuance generates novel approaches to African literature today. Rather than perceiving this brief prose narrative as an apprentice to the lengthy novel, the genre must be treated as a crafted form on its own.

The study, also, contributes arcane methods of research to African literature and languages that go beyond the conversational written text. It incorporates the multimedia (electronic form of narration) into pre-existing canonical tradition of print and textuality. This research shall be lively and interesting by networking practising artists and critics in live discussion engagements through a blogosphere that would serve as a platform for debate. Since this research is people-centred and reaches out to people directly, the chances of popularising falsehoods are limited. As outlined in the following section of methodology, the research will, among other methods, create a blogosphere as a forum for discussion of topical issues within African literary discourses. As far as we endeavour to execute it, this approach will prove exciting, let alone, innovative. In a nutshell, the present research is worthwhile because it constructs offshore lenses that avoid the mean stereotypes of retaining the tapestry of Eurocentric literary tradition in African literature.

### **1.7. Scope of study**

The central thesis of this study is the resurgence and nourishment of the short story tradition within the contemporary canonised Zimbabwean literature. It reflects the dominant analytical paradigms that situate the short story within the African literary and cultural identity, hereby conjoined and code-named '*Africulture*.' It is a search for canonical rootedness of the short story within the "freighted index of the continuity between the oral and the teleological progression from the oral past to a literate future," (Moolla, 2012: 2.) The study argues for the centrality of the genre in Zimbabwean prose fiction.



The research project is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction to the research. It explicates the background of study, statement of problem, aim and objectives of research, the rationale and scope of research. The introduction is imperative in as much as it structures the outline of the study. It directs the research. Chapter Two reviews literature that foregrounds the thesis of the study. Magosvongwe's comments about the nature of Zimbabwean short story take centre-stage. Attendant views about the peripheral treatment of the genre in the face of the preferential novel will be reviewed. Chapter Three presents the conceptual framework and methodological approach pliant to the study. The study is informed by Afrocentricity, which perceives reality of the short story conception within the analytical lenses of Africanness. Chapter Four and Five present and analyse data collated during the tenure of research. It is the core of our thesis that projects the centrality of the short story in Zimbabwean narrative constructions. Chapter Six is the conclusion. It sums up the arguments advanced in the preceding chapters.

## **1.8 Definition of terms**

- 1.8.1 Africulture:** Etymologically, *Africulture* derives from [our] lexical adulteration of 'Africa' and 'culture' to determine a philosophical bridge for comprehending Africa and Africanness. This neologistic portmanteau designates phenomena typically African.
- 1.8.2 Canon:** Determinate set of codes whose ambition is to render the texts in question the most representative work of art. It is the state of being privileged or accorded special status by an idolising culture.
- 1.8.3 Folklore:** The word "folklore" is a compound noun. The words, "folk" which refers to people and "lore" which means the stories and traditions of a particular group of people, are constitutive. Folklore can therefore be defined as the unwritten traditional literature of a culture. Abrams (1981:66) maintains that folklore includes, amongst others, stories, legends, superstitions, songs, folktales, proverbs, riddles, spells, nursery rhymes, pseudo-scientific lore about the weather, plants and animals, customary activities at births, marriages, and deaths, and traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings. All these aspects are transmitted from one generation to another by an ideal vehicle of word of mouth, (oral,) rather than in written form.

- 1.8.4 Satire:** A literary device of art or writing which principally ridicules its subject often as an intended mean of provoking or preventing change. It is a composition that directly or indirectly attacks human vice or folly to reprobation. Satire is a keen or severe exposure of what in public or private morals deserve rebuke; an invective story. Irony and humour are often used to aid this.
- 1.8.5 Technauriture:** A term expounded by Kaschula (2004) to refer to the link between orality, literacy and technology. It is the linguistic portmanteau of three terms; a blend of *technology*, *aural* (oral) and *culture*.
- 1.8.6 Zimbabwean literature:** A multivalent term referring to the creative corpora mediated in the indigenous African languages; predominantly Shona and IsiNdebele, as well as in English language by black Zimbabweans both domestic and in diaspora. It could refer also to publications by White writers during the war (1972 to 1979) but their works have been aptly designated “Rhodesian Literature” (Chennells, 1995). Significant White authors like Doris Lessing and Wilbur Smith, although contributing to the corpus of Zimbabwean literature, mandate different categorisation as they feature elsewhere as British and/or South African writers, (Malaba, 1998). This study retains a restrictively operational view of ‘Zimbabwean literature’ as a compendium of written and oral works of art expressed in the indigenous African languages and English by black Zimbabweans domiciled in the country and in the diaspora. While emphasis is on literature written in Indigenous African languages recourse to English literary works is imperative to minimise the exaggerated differences between Zimbabwean works in the indigenous African languages and in English.

## 1.9 Conclusion

The proposal, which questions the place of canon in African literature, has laid bare the scope of our thesis. It studies the short story genre in the Zimbabwean context. It argues that the genre has received peripheral treatment from the scholarly fraternity. The tendency by pioneering critics has been to lump the short story analysis with the novel. Writers, as well, seem to have been socialised to perceive the novel as the paragon of art. This study challenges these propositions and endeavours to argue for the centrality and primacy of the genre in African narrative discourses.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Literature review does not function as merely a list of resources with summaries (which is the sole function of databases). It conveys to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, (Reaves and Gibson, 2013: 1).*

### 2.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter presents the outline of this study. It schemes the research's trajectory. Within it the background, aim and objectives, statement of the problem, questions to be answered by the research, justification and scope of the study as well as summary of chapters are delineated. The chapter reconstructed the proposition that African literature in general, and Zimbabwean per se, is rocked by the problem of defining its prose genres in typological studies. Canonisation, regardless of its complexities, permeates the ambivalences inherent in the disorientation of the short story typology in Zimbabwe's novelistic discourses. The canonists' values and tastes turned creativity into a literary prison that impeded the innovative impulse and empathic appreciation of modern Shona prose literary sensibilities. This problem manifests in the confounded integrationist approach to the theorisation and conceptualisation of the short story vis-à-vis the novel and is phenomenal among most critics of African prose literature today.

Chapter two ensues from the above conjecture to review the literature foregrounding the problem of canonicity of Zimbabwean prose literature. As De Vos (1991:129) acknowledges, literature review provides the "framework of the research and identifies the scope of knowledge" that the study intends to expand. Research, therefore, derives from a review of the existing scholarship to determine how extant epistemologies inform the present. Interrogation of existing body of knowledge about the African short story ardently positions the current research to attack the problem of Africa literary canon and canonicity with "deeper insight and more complete knowledge," (Leedy, 1993:87). Literature review, then, entails systematic collation, synthesis and critical analysis of pertinent information relative to the research hypotheses or assumptions. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:109) regard as "related literature" any work that owes credence and support to the problem under research.

As Pelegrino (1979:42) avers, a worthwhile literature review is a well-proved, well-marked roadway on which to drive and arrive safely at a destination. According to Neuman (1997:89) “knowledge accumulates.” We learn from and build on what others have done. O’Leary (2010:71) posits that, “The production of new knowledge is fundamentally dependent on past knowledge.” The same proposition is maintained by Reaves and Gibson (2013:1) who argue that;

Although surveying literature on a particular research topic is often considered incidental because the process has become more simplified with advances in technology, conducting and crafting such a literature review are crucial steps to a researcher’s/ scholar’s preparation for entrance into current discussions in his or her field. This process, as it provides an account of what has been published on a topic, acknowledges accredited scholars and researchers; therefore, because the literature review does not function as merely a list of resources with summaries (which is the sole function of databases), it conveys to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

The convergence precinct of these views is the principle that today’s studies are built on those of yesterday. The rationale for writing this literature review, therefore, is to link the study of the Zimbabwean short story to developed and developing epistemologies about African literary canon. The literature review tenaciously vouches for credibility of the research by placing the project within its appropriately informed canonical context and demonstrating the relevance of the short story within Zimbabwean and African literary canonical inter-connectedness.

## **2.1 The Canon Wars: Afro-American Debate**

The Zimbabwean/African short story thesis is encumbered with the 1980s - 90s raging debate about Afro-American ‘canon’ and ‘canon- formation.’ The current project’s contestation of the African literary canon finds expression in the similar conflictual debate about the criteria for determining and reading the literary value of African American literature. According to Reaves and Gibson (2013) the Afro-American wars are embedded in the transmission of the canon within the African American college classroom. Lauter’s works reconnoitre the canon controversy by contesting the criteria for determining student courses and syllabi issues within the American collegiate context. Lauter (1983a) insists that the canon feuds hover around what literary texts students should study. The wars challenge how standards of quality are defined or measured and how the limitations of theoretical discourses on the way

issues pertaining to race, gender, and social class are debated (Lauter, 1983b:435-463). In view of Lauter (1991) the debate quizzes the constitution of ‘canon’ within the context of the school, college and university institutional practices, focusing predominantly on how it shaped not only the pedagogy but collegiate personnel’s approach to teaching, curricular and research priorities.

The 1970s scholarly struggle which sought to recover the ‘lost’ or ‘forgotten’ Afro-American texts gained prominence and consummated in the 1980/90s canon wars, (Bona and Maimi, 2006). Whereas the 1970s struggle sought to produce, avail and distribute works of “contemporary women and writers of colour and work that had been ignored and silenced in the past,” (ibid: 2) the 1980/90s canonical disputes re-valued these works to examine the cultural norms that elevated certain productions at the expense of others. Earlier endeavours had seen academics and scholars put together several anthologies as syllabi or reading lists for their respective collegiate institutions. The nexus of anthologisation and accessibility of texts culminated in the heated national debate about canon formation, (ibid: 6) in which critics questioned the criteria for determining the selected texts’ literary value. Thus the raging controversy shifted from being mere criticism of the literary canon, (syllabi and textbooks) to questioning the apparatus of canonicity, (the anthologies and the conventions that produced them).

The core of the American ‘canon wars’ entrenches in the dialectics of its definitional conception. The definition of canon remained largely elusive hence its discussion was not a neutral undertaking for the early Afro-American critics. In an attempt to define canon, Lauter (1991: ix) alludes to the eccentricities of its conception.

By canon I mean the set of literary works, the grouping of significant philosophical political and religious texts, [sic] the particular accounts of history generally accorded cultural weight within society. How one defines a cultural canon obviously shapes a collegiate curricular and research priorities, but it also helps to determine precisely whose experience and ideas become central to academic study.

Lauter suggests that academic pundits use power, (institutional or otherwise,) to condition the importation of syllabi and the availability of texts. Conversely, conflicting views about the reading and teaching of the ethnically diverse American literature instigated the vexed ‘canon

wars' which were largely embedded in the excavation of works of women and people of colour, (Lauter, 1991) as well as in determining the criteria for elevating certain kinds of writing at the expense of others within the same social and cultural context (Bubíková, 2006).

As Bona and Maimi (2006:7) aver, Black American academics were (and still are) divided over the issue of canon. One side of the divide comprises the traditional conservatives who categorically resist expanding the canon sceptical that the "masterpieces would remain untaught." Bona and Maimi consider these canonical elitists as advocates of 'cultural literacy' who are indelibly indebted to "objective reality of greatness" (ibid: 7) entrenched in extant cultural canon. On the other end of the spectrum are the canon expanders or "liberal pluralist" (Guillory, 1993: vii) who "consider the transformation of perception that occurs when a traditional category is shattered by adding a range of different works" (Lauter, 1983: xxiii).

The polarisation between the conservatives and the canon expanders ensued in perpetual antagonism, hence the war was not meant to be won. Bartelli (2010:1) contends that:

The resulting confusion has culminated in the twenty-first century with many literary movements left in a state of ideological uncertainty. Though every critical theory and each cultural segment provide certain insights about literature, the representative critics often seem content to simply bicker for prominence rather than to forge a unified approach to the literary canon. This infighting has resulted in demands for canon reformation while inadvertently perpetuating fragmentation.

This inquiry observes identical imperious fragmentation within the African literary tradition where canon issues remain as imprecise processes with no conclave of critical cardinals. The Zimbabwean short story's condition of canonical marginality is a case in point where the much wieldier novel is considered the conventional canon. Thus African/Zimbabwean literary tradition seems to be rocked by similar Afro-American canonical conflicts. There seem to be people in academia, (or other institutional powers) who conspire to preserve existing African literary canon by reinforcing the curricular they inherited from the former colonial master at independence. The conservatives consciously contrive to preserve the status quo by their denial to expand the African literary canon to recognise 'forgotten' artefacts, especially those of oral nature. The relegation of the short story form exemplifies such conservatism. This study seeks a counter-current autopsy that demystifies and

diversifies the somewhat conservative African canon in order to accommodate the ensconced but de facto short story canon. This position has substantial import for the study of short stories and other orally marginalised artefacts, if African academe is to expand in canonical terms.

For a coherent reconstruction of the study's thesis the on-going inquiry usurps Henry Louis Gates and John Guillory's contribution to the great African American canon feuds. Gates' (1988) appropriation of the value of 'black literary tradition' and Guillory's (1993) idea of canon as 'cultural capital' reinforce the present study's hypothesis about canonical otherness of the short story and other minor canons. The baseline is that canon is elitist; it regulates access to and exclusion from its literary tradition. However, the current research observes an unprecedented proliferation of the once marginalised art forms within the contemporary dispensation. This resurgence excites a theory about the marginalised genres' mutation that warrants a review of their process of canonisation. The up-coming exposition explores Gates and Guillory's respective conceptual standpoints informing the present research's elicited argument.

### **2.1.1 Gates' Canon- formation and the Afro- American literary tradition**

This study reposes its thesis about the marginal condition of the short story canon in Gates' research interest of rediscovering the Black American 'lost' texts which made him one of the premier black theorists of the Afro-American literary canon. His 1990s post-structuralist works identify African American inherited oral tradition as the signifier of its canon (Gates, 1990). Gates saddles the debate on the need for Black American writers to represent their Black experience as the defining rudiment of their literature. He decries the Western literary and critical traditions whose 'canon' had tragically entrapped Afro-American writers and critics to replicate their black literary images after the coloniser's Universalist cum culturally neutral literary tradition. Gates (1990, in Richter 2000:177) writes:

Our criticism is destined merely to be derivative, to be a pale shadow of the white master's critical discourse, until we became confident enough to speak in our own black languages as we theorise about the black critical endeavour.

Gates proposes a reactionary theory inscribed in black indigenous African languages tradition to negate the Eurocentric critical dominance. Gates (1988) reconstructs a complex concept of 'black tradition' whose origin is rooted in the Yoruba myths of Esu-Elegbara and Fon myths of Legba. His comprehensive but sophisticated elucidation of these mythologies "reveals an indigenous black hermeneutical principle," (Carby, 2010:233) whose transposition is equivalent to the present study's idea of *Africulture*. The mystery of the complex mythology as "signifiers" whose rhetoric and interpretation is "fundamentally black," creates "*homo rhetoricus Africanus*" (Gates, 1988:3).

This study finds Gates' idea of '*homo rhetoricus Africanus*' quite intriguing. The study argues that the inclusion of short story within the mainstream African literary canon is desirable and long overdue. The impulse towards establishing the African short story cultural autonomy rests upon Gates' (ibid: 3) assumption that the existence of a unique black indigenous African languages tradition shapes the African [American] literature. The logic of "an indigenous hermeneutical principle" (Carby, 2010:233) permits the on-going research to challenge, (within the precincts of *Africulture*,) the dialectics of the exclusion of short story genre from the mainstream literary canon. In as much as canon functions precisely to exclude *othered* literary discourses an appraisal of its function, its apparatus or its formulations remains unasked in Zimbabwean indigenous African languages literary tradition. Whilst the concern for canon-formation is a "conventional literary project," (ibid: 233) the debate about whether or not it is necessary for Zimbabwean indigenous African languages literature is still a grey area which the present study seeks to navigate.

Gates (1990) traces the debate about an African American canon to Theodore Parker's 1846 and 1849 speeches in which Parkers expressed discontent with American letters' identity to the English tradition. Parker's 1846 speech registered the concern that Afro-American Literature, Science and the Arts had no permanent cultural roots. They were mere pastiches of foreign types which did not reflect the Black people's morals, manners, politics or religion. In his 1849 speech the more resolved Parker finds a distinctively original genre of Afro-American literature:



The real American literature is found only in newspapers and speeches, perhaps in some novels, hot passionate but poor and extemporaneous. That is our national literature, (Gates, 1990:179).

However, it lasted three quarters of a century for critics to realise Parker's observation about the originality and peculiarity of Afro-American "slave narratives." The debate's resurgence in the 1990s was a critical realisation that 'real American literature' dwells within the occasionally "poor and extemporaneous" literary mass. The recognition culminated in the publication of Black American literature into popular projects, (called anthologies,) to be used for teaching African American Literature. '*The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*' (1997) and '*Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology*,' (1998) are examples. Gates expresses excitement to co-edit the '*Norton*' Anthology together with McKay. He is concerned that the anthology would define a 'canon' for "instructors and students at any institution which desires to teach a course in Afro-American literature," (Gates, 1990, in Richter, 2000:181). He further asserts that, "So much of our literature seems dead on the page when compared to its performance (ibid: 182). Gates and McKay (1997) incorporate oral performative discourses and the black human voice into the printed text in order to trace the indigenous roots of the Black American tradition. They stress that the robust oral and indigenous languages base of their literature is cardinal and innovative in anthology production.

Each period will include both printed and spoken text of oral and musical selection (on cassette tapes) of vernacular culture: sermons, blues, spirituals, R & B, and poets reading their own dialect poem, speeches and other performances, (Ibid: 182)

The current research avers to situate real Zimbabwean literature within the ordinarily "poor and extemporaneous" lot which the mainstream perceives as 'popular culture.'

An equally controversial aspect sprouting from Gates' idea of canon-formation is its relativity to or dependence on the canonist rubric. Gates (op cit: 181) accedes that the 'canon' he and McKay formed, defined and then anthologised is "our canon" based on a set of "selection among several possible sets of selections." As one of the editors Gates is oblivious of the politics and ironies of canon-formation that excluded what the editors considered non-canonical. The texts that entered Gates' canon survived the editors' sever because they satisfied 'their' canonical rubric. According to Carby (2010:235) Gates categorically rejects Richard Wright from his community of writers and critics. He questions Wright's definition

of 'blackness' accusing him of creating a "class of ideal individual black selves ... at the expense of his fellow blacks," (ibid: 235). He dismisses Wright's idea of blackness as contemptibly "a noble black savage," (ibid: 235). Thus the possibility of the exclusion of other black writers from 'their' canon explains that canon-formation exercises substantial censor on the resultant literary tradition. The thesis of this study is that canonicity encodes a set of cultural cum ideological values on which a literary tradition may or may not find expression. Against that background, the African/Zimbabwean literary canon, as canonising culture is discussed as responsible for the validation of its structural powers that favour the continuity of a colonially incepted canon. The canon favours the production of the novel at the expense of the short story.

Keenly conscious of the biases of canon-formation Gates (1997) explains how 'they' tried to harness the diverse array of ideological, methodological and theoretical perspectives that could produce an anthology representative of the various definitions of Afro-American literature. He categorically states that:

Our task will be to bring together the essential texts of the canon, the crucially central authors, those whom we feel to be indispensable to an understanding of the shape and shaping of the tradition. A canon is the essence of the tradition: the connection between the texts of the canon reveals the tradition's inherent veiled logic, its internal rationale, (op. cit: 181).

The present study finds canon-formation as a reductive, exclusionary and elitist reconstruction of the very same centre/periphery polarity that it claims to oppose. The study argues that a formed 'canon' can never be all-inclusive, absolute or natural. Given that scholars make canons in the same way as the former Western colonial master did, it is incumbent upon this study to question whether or not 'canon-formation' propagates the canonising ideology's take on the prevailing literary modes. It excites the on-going thesis to contest canon as 'formation,' on one hand and as 'an imposition,' on the other. The contention is that scholars form canon whilst colonial hegemony and its attendant Great Western Literary tradition impose canon. In view of the contrast between canon as formation and as an imposition, the on-going study questions what obtains when a literary tradition is canonised. The burning question is: Is canonicity necessary for African literature, both continental and diasporic?

The upshot is that canon's ideological power, as an appendage of the Western colonial superstructure, exists and proliferates as an imperious matrix. The criticism of African, Afro-American, Asiatic or Caribbean literature, even within the contemporary dispensation, reveals an inherent ideological power of canon in revolt against extant oral literary sites. Within this power matrix orality, (traditional modes such as short stories, folktales, songs and legends,) falls the marginalised victim of the canon's ideological practice mediated through the system of literacy, (textuality). The case of the canonical deracination (eradication) of African short story enthuse the thesis of present study. It is imperative for this research to examine the impact of African canons' ideological power on the indigenous African languages' aural, oration and performative roots. The study clinches that canonicity is responsible for the deracination of these indigenous African languages roots.

Gates' contestation of 'canon' as 'formation' fundamentally informs the thesis of this study which perceives liminal condition of the African short story as a function of canon's negative manifestation. Several burning issues about canonicity emerge eliciting the current project to quiz the following: What is canon? Is 'canon' a 'formation,' (as Gates insists about the Afro-American canon) or an imposition? Who forms the canon? To what extent is a 'formed' canon representative of the eclectic and ever-changing literary artefacts of a given culture? Gates, therefore, incites our research interests about the effects of canon on African literature, in general and Zimbabwean per se. The present study holds that canon, as a contested terrain, is responsible for the deracination of the African/Zimbabwean short story from the mainstream institutional curricular. Whereas Gates and his school of thought are instrumental in the congenital formation of the Afro-American canon, the question of the African/Zimbabwean literary canon remains elusive. This study endeavours to gap up the inconsistencies and vagaries inherent in debates about African literary canon along Gates' postulation.

### **2.1.2 Guillory and canon as cultural capital**

While Gates and Lauter's contestation of the African American 'canon' has largely been a legitimization of texts to be taught in schools, Guillory (1993) quizzes the visibility (or lack

thereof) of a unifying culture within the learning institutions. In delusion of the assumption that canon is a vehicle of transmission of national culture, Guillory observes that the school transmits a relative culture of its own. He insists that the absence of a national culture within the school culture projects out of a school “curriculum of artefacts based on imaginary cultural unity” that does not coincide with the “culture of the nation state” (Guillory, 1993:219). The national culture to which the undergraduates are subjected to is always a “specific realisation of the knowledge defined by the university curriculum,” (ibid: 219). He further notes that:

The extraordinary effects of confusing school culture with national culture are most conspicuous when the national culture swallow ... Western culture in a way as to produce an image of the American nation as the telos of western Cultural evolution, (ibid: 219).

Guillory implies that Western culture displaces real national cultural continuity within the Afro-American school system. Thus the absence of national culture suggests that the perceived monolith of Western culture has not been contested in canonical debates. By implication, if the Western culture to which Afro-American students would have direct access is not contested, its canon will ultimately be “constructed and legitimated as objects of study,” (ibid: 221). Guillory perceives the resultant canon as a process of “deracination from the actual cultural circumstances of their production and consumption,” (ibid: 222). The main concern of the canon debate, according to Guillory (1990:5) should be “the representation or lack of representation of certain social groups in the canon.” Guillory is not concerned about which text or authors will be included in the literary canon but the crisis condition governing the school culture.

Guillory’s dialectics of domination and subordination within national/school cultural divide accentuates Casanova’s (2004:30) hypothesis of an artistic “field of forces” in which the canonical ideology and the writer’s cultural tradition struggle for dominance. This creates “unequal power relations” (ibid: 30) within the field resulting in an uneven development of the world’s “literary spaces” in an “unequal structure ... of literary space,” (ibid: 83). This, in turn, creates the existence of “dominant and dominated” or “small literatures,” (ibid: 175) amongst contending ideologies. Casanova concedes that literary repression results in the “fragmentation and marginalisation of non-hegemonic cultures and communities in academic as well as in other spheres,” (ibid: 175).

If ‘canonical exclusion’ is to be considered in terms of the social function and institutional protocol of the school that works to “regulate access to the forms of cultural capital,” (Guillory, 1993: vii) then, the concept of cultural capital provides the basis for a new historical account of the process of canon formation “within the immediate social condition of the institution,” (ibid: vii). For Guillory canon must contest the constitution and distribution of cultural capital in terms of “access to the means of literary production and consumption,” (ibid: ix). He castigates the school for providing the ‘means’ which regulates the distribution of cultural capital unevenly.

The ambiguities Guillory reveals in the conception of culture reflect what is currently obtaining in the curricular of most African universities and collegiate institutions. There is no grounded commensuration between the literary canon and the totality of the living culture of the graduates. The oral traditions from which the African short story genre originates have been devalued by the colonially inherited Western text tradition that authorised novel production. This study contends that most African Universities inherited the Western elitist attitude that elevates the novel as the highest representational order of African narrative discourses. The short story hardly enters their institutional field of literary studies since orality as cultural condition is considered the prerogative of ethnographic or sociological studies (Finnegan, 1970). This project is fundamentally informed by Guillory’s argument that the study of the literary canon reveals an institutional culture far more detached from the total process of the students’ lived experiences out of school. At home or out of school the students live in a world of story-telling, song, dance and other forms of oral expressions that the mainstream African literary canon relegates as popular culture, hence non-canonical.

The on-going thesis, therefore, consents that the extant ‘text’ tradition functions to impose upon the students an acculturating curricular that regulates one to read the texts out of context. The current research borrows heavily from Guillory the suggestion that the institutional curricular or ‘cultural capital’ should traverse the terrain of alienation produced by existing canon. Thus Guillory’s conception of ‘canon as cultural capital’ raises essential issues germane to the on-going thesis. His observation that “a text tradition is not sufficient in itself either to constitute or to transmit a culture,” (ibid: 222) informs the present thesis’ argument that stands in a subversive relation to canonicity.

Guillory (1993) concludes by recasting the focus of the canon controversy to Afro-American multiculturalism that he perceives as the current crisis in the humanities. He argues canon-formation less as a question of representative social groups than of distribution of 'cultural capital' in institutions which regulate access to literacy and the practice of reading and writing. He insists that any critique of canon as a fixated concept of authorial identity overlooks the historical transformations that influence canon-formation, (ibid: 225). As Bona and Maimi (2006:13) aver, Guillory describes the canon debate as an "argument for opening the canon or the liberal critique" on issues of "multiculturalism, history of civilisation, feminist literature and culture, ethnicity... histories of non-White and non-European cultures." By implication the historicisation of literary works, quite often, confronts the mutual interrelation between dominant Western and dominated non-Western cultures. Whist Guillory acknowledges the existence of a multiplicity of sites of cultural production within Afro-American literature he maintains that such multiplicity should not be perceived "as though every cultural work were only the organic expression of discrete and autonomous culture," (ibid: 233). Guillory supports his proposition by citing Appiah (1991:354) who holds that "in the broad shape" of cultural circulation, "we are all already contaminated by each other." Appiah insists that the idea of an "autochthonous echt-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists" is a fallacy, (ibid: 354).

The present study observes a situation where modern African literature can no longer postulate a "unitary Africa over and against a monolithic west," (ibid: 354). Appiah advances the thesis that the post-colonial binary of the 'self' and 'other' is no longer conspicuous in terms of culture within the modern context of multiculturalism. The debates over canon now face thorny challenges about how to negotiate the shift in the wake of multiculturalism, globalisation and proliferation of the multi-media technologies. The present study seeks a conversation of the literary and cultural value of African canon within these current formulations. Transmigration, globalisation and multi-media technologies have created new contact zones that enrich cultural and literary hybridity. This project contends that all texts have contexts that are about cultural contact. The Zimbabwean short story has Zimbabwean cultural context that informs it. This overarching assumption raises both unsettling and exciting arguments about Zimbabwean literary canon, vis-à-vis the short story. The present study is an inquisition of the cultural context out of which the African/Zimbabwean literary canon emerged. It also interrogates the African short story's teleological development in the

wake of globalisation, transmigration and technological advancement to enhance emergent scholarship. It is not mere coincidence that the current context of cultural hybridity, ethnic cross-identification and the internet ambiance resonates with unprecedented proliferation of the short story corpora that threatens to submerge the novel. The on-going inquiry reposes on the convergence between the “web-based paradigm of multi-linearity ... and text-based non-linear, non-hierarchical paradigm,” (Bona and Maimi, 2006:17). The study seeks to establish that electronic writing poses challenges to the “impermanence, facility, fragility and freedom” of print writing, (ibid: 17).

### **2.1.3 Synopsis**

This research considers the Afro-American canon debate as a launch-pad for challenging the canonical conspiracies inherent within African academia and/or literature Bureaux’. The study argues that the canonists’ elitism structurally marginalised the canonisation of the short story. The American canon wars, therefore, serve as radar for the on-going research to negotiate “cultural battles and changing norms of correctness” within the African literary canon that “imposed set of rules controlling cultural production” (Rakefet, 2002:148). The current autopsy of the African canon vis-à-vis the short story challenges the prevailing status quo in which the written text is polarised against unwritten oral traditions. The polarisation creates charged diametric forces between the ‘canonical text’ and non-canonical oral mass. Within this divide, the short story falls within the ‘forgotten’ oral lot. What lacks from this conflicting equation is the sense of revival and continuity of the short story canon.

As Rakefet (2002:145) advances the canon wars attest the existence of a more “solid body of artefacts and patterns of action” that enjoys consensus across society and time, “even in cases where specific contemporary ideologies tend to reject them.” He avers that:

Regardless of the specific historical conditions of its canonisation, this canonised repertoire is hardly distinctive of any of the particular rival groups striving for domination in a given social space. It is in fact canonised in the sense that it is widely shared, accumulative, and durable. That is, unlike contemporary prevailing tastes or norms of correctness, this sanctioned repertoire is persistent, or, at least, seems to be

much less sensitive to social tensions and transitions which for other cultural segments may result in a total displacement, (ibid: 145).

This study's point of medial convergence with Rakefet is the idea that canonisation of the novel as the crest of bourgeois literature sanctioned the total exclusion of formerly existing non-canonised forms such as short stories. The novel is presented as the "ultimate Modern form of expression and hence the *alternative par excellence* to the so-called classical "old-world" forms, noticeably the short story epic, (ibid: 145). He adds:

Further, the glorification of the novel as the apex of the contemporary literary practice certainly involved the marginalisation, at least to some extent, of the previously prevailing forms. Yet, as a rule, all those canonised literary models and works which constituted the old canon were never really displaced. They continued to be celebrated by the propagators of the modern national (bourgeois) culture for the last two hundred years, and even if some of them ceased to be practiced (as in the case of the epic), they still remain a most important property of the African legacy until the present day, (Ibid: 145).

In view of the above, African American canon conflicts reflects the general condition of African/Zimbabwean literary canon. The novel is extolled as the most representative canon at the expense of the short fiction. The on-going research, therefore, interrogates the following imperative questions obtaining from the above. How can the previously marginalised short story epic negotiate its way into the canon? As Spivak (1993:271) points out, "There can be no general theory of canons. Canons are the condition of institutions and the effect of institutions. Canons secure institutions and institutions secure canons." How can these institutional canons be untangled to permit side-lined de facto canons to emerge and be incorporated?

It is not a mere contingency that this study brings the short story into the arena of the African/Zimbabwean institutional curricular conflict. The marginalisation of the short story genre as site of non-canonical oral artefacts is commonplace. It is barred and undervalued by the dominant Western 'text' tradition that favours the novel production. This current research, in this regard, questions what obtains when oral productions, such as short stories, are ignored by the 'writing' culture. How can the modern short story traverse notions of canonical de-constructedness? What are the implications of 'canon' in regulating cultural production and consumption?



Our point of departure with the great Afro-American canonical feud lies in orientation. Whereas the former is a controversy over the condition of acceptability of writings of black people, women and people of colour into the canon, the present task problematises the acceptability of the short story into the Zimbabwean literary canon. The absence of short story within these debates is quite conspicuous. The Afro-American canon contests are more about institutional, theoretical and historiographic factors shaping canon-formation in a context of multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural dispensation. The preoccupation of these American canon wars is the presentation of the ideological vectors that shape the literary works themselves and the context of the institutions in which they are taught. The debates seldom question the position of the short story within this divide. The present study brings about the canon question as a precursor to exclusively focus on short stories whose exclusion from the main stream debate is cause for concern. The lack of the reflection of the short story is a form of the most deluded assumption that short stories occupy a peripheral canonical position. Thus the present study addresses the canonical condition of the short story which the canon wars elide.

## **2.2 Towards an African literary Canon**

The Afro-American debate over canon spawned similar controversies in Africa over the canonisation of African literature. The African canon dispute is indeed, an extension of the American canon wars. The 1962 Makerere Conference, the first ever conference about canon to be hosted in Africa, was a follow-up to two successive congresses for Writers and artists of African descent held in France in 1956 and 1959, respectively. The Paris seminars were an extension of the Afro-American canon debate, held under the auspices of *Presence Africanise*, a Paris-based literary journal (Ngugi, 2014:1). Unlike its predecessors, the Makerere conference had “African literary aesthetics and decolonisation at the centre,” (ibid: 1). According to Bishop (1988) polemical issues surrounding the definition and the constraints of an African cultural and literary aesthetics ignited the 1962 Makerere Conference. According to Bishop (1988:18) the Ugandan Conference, convened at Makerere University, provoked heated discussion over the following questions:

Is African literature a body of literature produced in Africa by African and non-African Writers? Is it the literature produced by Africans of African descent? Or is it the literature produced by writers from all over the world writing on and about Africa? This stormy session struggled with definitions which threw up more questions and more definitions.

This new twist of the Afro-American canon wars in the African soil gave rise to the African literary canon. As Ngugi observes, the purveyors of the African literary canon were upbeat about their initiative. Ngugi documents that:

Reading their post-conference write-ups in the *Transition Journal*, the excitement with which they greeted their role as the instigators and vanguards of an emerging literary tradition is palpable. Indeed the writers in attendance, Chinua Achebe (age 32), Christopher Okigbo (age 32), Wole Soyinka (age 28), and James Ngugi (age 28), Bloke Modisane (age 39), Ezekiel Mphahlele (age 43), set in motion, within a few years, a literary tradition that would engulf subsequent generations in debates around the definition and category of African literature, the languages of African literature, the role of writers in political change, the writer in continental Africa versus the diaspora, and the relationship of African aesthetics to European aesthetics. (Ngugi, 2014:1).

The then youthful and vibrant African writers cum critics: Achebe, Okigbo, Soyinka, Ngugi, Modisane and Mphahlele, form the cradle of the African literary canon. Their battle questioned African literary canon's appendage to European literatures.

Unfortunately, the Makerere conference, composed mainly of West African scholars, failed to resolve the dispute. Bishop recounts two other symposia held successively, in March and April 1963, "at the Faculté des lettres of the University of Dakar and at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone" (Bishop, 1988:18). Under the theme, 'African Literature and the University Curriculum,' the Freetown conference reached a consensus that African literature had to be perceived as "any work in which an African setting is authentically handled, or to which experiences which originate in Africa are integral," (ibid: 19). Although they consented on this working definition of African literature, burning rage over the question of African setting and language of writing took the toll. Scholars quizzed the relation between literature and language. Wali (1963:14) debriefs the language controversy:

The whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture. In other words, until these [African] writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African

languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration.

Wali holds that language defines literature, as such, “African literature as now understood and practised, is merely a minor appendage in the main stream of European literature,” (ibid: 13). He distinguishes European literatures on the basis of language, for instance, French literature differs from German literature in terms of the language of writing. He repeats, “What therefore is now described as African literature in English and French, is a clear contradiction, and a false proposition, just as Italian literature in Hausa would be,” (ibid: 14).

Bishop cites Patrick Chakaipa, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o as supportive of Wali’s proposition. Chakaipa, whose bibliography boasts a host of novels written in the Shona language, insists, “It would appear that such a concrete language is especially fit for the writing of fiction,” (Chakaipa, in Bishop, 1988:28). Chakaipa’s article enlists the political value of writing in the indigenous African languages. As a clinch Chakaipa (1966:52) resolves, “It is almost impossible to build a great nation without indigenous African languages literature. In the same way as Chakaipa, Ngugi (1981) alludes to the political value of African languages for nation building. He laments the continued use of English and other European languages for the production of African literature. Ngugi (1981:5) contests the dialectical position of Leopold Senghor and Aime Césaire’s Negritude school of thought which his Makerere conference counterparts, Achebe, Mphahlele, Soyinka and Okigbo, had adopted.

Unfortunately, writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic encirclement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the language of imperialist imposition. Even at their most radical and pro-African position in their sentiments and articulation of problems they still took it as axiomatic that the renaissance of African cultures lay in the language of Europe.

In the same way as Wali, Ngugi registers displeasure with the South African critic, Mphahlele, and his cohorts who maintain a polemic view of language. Mphahlele and his associates perceive European languages; English, French and Portuguese as natural languages of literary and political mediation between Africa and the rest. Achebe (1964:62) vows:

Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it.

Achebe’s advocacy echoes Mphahlele’s firm acceptance of foreign languages as medium of expression in African literature. Mphahlele (1963:3) argues that:

English and French have become the common language with which to present a national front against white oppressors. Where the white man has already retreated, as in the independent states, these two languages are still a unifying force. By stages, each of the various states will need to find an African official language for itself.

Thus, the debate about African literature; the question about its audience, setting and language has become subject of scholarly dissertations and theses in universities. These scholarly deliberations culminated in Olaniyan and Quayson's (2007) compiled and edited anthology of African literature. The anthology became one of the earliest canonical apparatus of African literature to "redress the glaring lack; construct an easily accessible 'home' for canonical statements of African literary criticism and theory" (Olaniyan and Quayson 2007:1). Conspicuously absent from this anthology, a compilation of essays and articles by close to hundred critics, is short story critique. The novel is singularly discussed as African fiction/prose. This study upholds that this controversial introduction to African literature authored the contrived near-extinction of the short story genre.

The current study perceives the cursory treatment of the matter of African short story within this divide as deliberate. From the onset, the debate about African literary canon side-lines the short story by extolling the virtue of the novel. The record conferences and anthologised scholarly deliberations are predominantly selective and exclusionary on the issue of short story. Noticeably, the earlier seminars excluded not only the short story but writers of indigenous African languages from participation. The conference participants' ever-growing need to distinguish "real" art from its "cheap fakes" become a "force controlling standards of taste and responsible for the circulation of [rigid] practices" (Rakefet, 2002:147) as the African literary canon. The study perceives this deliberate disassociation of the language of thinking, of daily speech and interaction from the language of writing as instrumental in the marginalisation of the rich African tradition of story-telling, proverbs and riddles. Thus the African short story declines in status from serious adult literature to stories for children, Achebe, 1963). Kahari (1986) regards it as art for art's sake. For Ngara (1982) it is popular decoration/art. However, Achebe, Kahari and Ngara do not question the deterioration of the genre in canonical terms. The on-going study therefore, questions this near demise of the short story genre in African literary canon production.

For a much more grounded proposition, the current study reviews Ojaide's contribution to the African literary canon. His depiction of the 'contemporary African condition' is crucial for the present study. The literature reviewed so far presents a generalised state of affairs. It opens a Pandora's Box where several critical issues can explode. Yet, for this study, the short story is our thesis. The ensuing review narrows the thesis to the African short story study.

### **2.2.1 The Modern literary canon: The contemporary African Condition**

This thesis owes its credence to Ojaide's (1992, 2008, 2009 and 2012) nascent and diverse critical perspectives on the evolving nature of African literature, a phenomenon he succinctly depicts as "the contemporary African condition" (1992:46). Ojaide's literary corpora offer a scintillating trajectory of the development of modern African literature. His contention is that since literature is a cultural construct, "it is dynamic and so always evolving" with the times (ibid: 46). Elsewhere, Ojaide (2009:1) argues that since African literature is a cultural construct, controversies over "cultural acceptability, African-ness, or Africanity," of the African text have fulminated in scholarly critical deliberations across the continent. He adds, "The cultural identity of modern African literature is a major consideration in establishing a canon for its texts," (ibid: 3). It is within this context of valuation of "African cultural sensibilities" and "aesthetic appraisal" that the question of canon becomes an imperative thesis of this study, (ibid: 3). This study concurs with Ojaide that "the idea of an African literary canon is one that has often been raised in controversies but not addressed head-on in its totality," (ibid: 3).

A corollary of Ojaide's disambiguation of the term 'canon' reveals that canon is a universal contestation. There is African literary canon as much as there is Western literary canon. He explicates:

By inference, if literature is a cultural production, as there is a Western literary canon, so also will there be an African literary canon. Inevitably, since writers of Europe, North America (Canada and the United States), and European world peoples in Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere have their literary canon as defined by critics such as Harold Bloom and others, one needs to define what is the African literary canon. The African literary canon is based on the African-ness or Africanity and what it constitutes in literary terms, (ibid: 2).

This study, however, narrows its focus to African literary canon as the basis for considering the specific vectors and idiosyncrasies of the institutional paradigms that lend their cross-cultural and counter-cultural elements into Zimbabwean literary canon. Ojaide's definition of the African literary canon widens the spectrum to the whole gamut of African people's overall experience and aesthetic values. He says:

African literary canon is related to the African experience, which has strong cultural and historical underpinnings. In addition, what constitutes the African experience forms a significant part of the canonical definition... Issues of ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics, and tradition are also involved in the people's experience and what constitutes the highest standards of a literary achievement. Furthermore, the cultural identity of the people with any uniqueness in their artistic production is also involved in this exploration. All such controversial debates contest what should be or not be part of the African literary canon, or what Abiola Irele describes as "the African imagination," (ibid: 3).

Stimulated here is that African literary canon, as an element of Africa's cultural history, appeals to the whole array of Africa's autochthony. Ojaide's linkage of canon formation to the culture indigenous to a people sets a logical premise for this study's pursuance of short story genre whereby persistent cultural memory, images and ideas appear as its rudiments. Taking after Ojaide, the study perceives cultural memory as part of the constitution and legitimisation (or consequent exclusion) of particular cultural artefacts within African/Zimbabwean literary canon. Emphasis on 'exclusion' reinforces the possibility of marginalisation of autonomous traditions from the canonising imperial culture. Cultural exclusivity will, therefore, be contextualised in the argument informing this research as a symptom of the power dynamics within the African historical context of domination defined by Western cultural imperialism that segregated officious African artefacts adjudged non-canonical by the canonising ideology. Perceived in the light shed by Ojaide, canonicity in African literature is a complex process of construction and evaluation of the African text pervaded by the politics of inclusion and exclusion as defined by the institutional powers governing literature.

Examining the idea of an "African literary canon through the creative talents of African writers and their critics" Ojaide (2009:2) insists:

The term "canon" will be used here in its simple meaning of being "privileged," or given special status, by a culture. Broadly speaking, works that attain the status of classics and are repeatedly discussed, anthologised, or reprinted are usually said to have entered the canon. Of course, different schools of critics, especially Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, cultural, and minority ones argue that many artistic works may

not enter the canon if they do not conform to the mainstream ideology. The discussion of the African literary canon will have more to do with what makes African literature general than isolating specific texts into a superior class of its own.

Ojaide contextualises the idea of ‘canonisation’ in terms reminiscent of Fleming. For Fleming (2007) canon connotes that only a selected few of all the works constituting a given literary tradition are generally accepted as valid, authoritative, or consecrated and, therefore, prescribed as worth studying. The term, with its “etymology in a hierarchical privileging” (Ede, 2013:9) “of particular biblical scriptures by the church fathers” (Bruns, 1984:3) underscores the centrality of ideologies of value in the formation of literary taste. This underwrites Guillory’s conceptualisation of canon as a “secular curricular and hierarchical list of privileged literary texts,” (Ede, 1993:6). Discussing the canon’s relativeness to the literary fictional universe, Guillory (1993:6) expresses the ‘consecration’ involved in such a listing in terms of the “scriptural closure reminiscent of biblical canonical antecedents.”

Ojaide’s construal of the African literary canon raises issues fundamental to the scope of this thesis. This study quizzes; whose ideological codes reinforce the short story’s state of canonical *otherness*? What are the criteria for determining “what constitute cultural acceptability in African literary works?” (Ojaide, 2009:2). As noted by Ojaide, “Once there is a canon, it follows that there will be works outside its domain or what could be described as non-canonical works,” (Ibid: 2). Thus the possibility of the existence of “non- canonical works” impels the present inquiry of the contemporary short story. The premise is that the genre is evidence of de facto segregation of less bureaucratic canonical works. The present study’s medial point of convergence with Ojaide’s posting is that the African literary canon’s rubric worked to evaluate and elevate what the canonist hegemony deemed necessary, of higher quality, worthy of study and preservation at the expense of the ‘othered’ lesser literary examples such as the short story corpus.

Notwithstanding the congruence, Ojaide does not offer a comprehensive exegesis of what he terms “canonising culture,” (ibid: 1). Employed in its simplest sense of being “privileged,” or accorded exceptional eminence by a canonising culture, a literary text attains the status of prototype by being “repeatedly discussed, anthologised or reprinted,” (ibid: 1). Thus Ojaide predicates canon’s proliferation on a culture that canonises. However, he leaves the question of the nature of the “canonising culture” open to speculation. Considering Davis’s (2003:8) affirmation that literary canon, in its modest form, should be discussed as a collection of texts

“esteemed within a defined culture and considered as an important part of that culture’s heritage,” the questions about the nature of canonising culture becomes paramount. Is African literary canon a ‘formation’ reminiscent of Gates? Is the notion of canon synonymous with writing, defined as literacy, text or print capital in Western literary tradition? Could it be a direct result of Africa’s contact with the West in the nineteenth century that indexed ‘writing’ an indispensable ruse of Western imperialism? Is canon a preserve of the university pundits and collegiate elite whose defiant rejection of ‘art for art’s sake’ favours the so called ‘high culture?’ What obtains when a literary culture is canonised? These are the questions this research wrestles with.

Ojaide’s innovative approach to critiquing ‘the contemporary African condition’ also stimulates significant hypotheses germane to the scope of the present research; the liminal nature of the contemporary African short story (2013) and the influence of trans-migration and globalisation on African modern literature (2008). The genre’s survival and resurgence within the contemporary dispensation of multimedia technologies is a subject worth of study. The following exposition reviews Ojaide’s postulation of the twosome aspects that form the core of the present investigation.

### **2.2.1.1 The condition of liminality of the contemporary African short story**

A fresh stimulus for the current study’s interest in the liminocentric nature of the Zimbabwean short story obtains from Ojaide’s (2013:22) reflection that “the [African] short story for long has not been a popular form in African literature compared to poetry, fiction, and drama.” Ojaide (2013:22) laments:

This is despite the fact that, in form, it is closest to the folktale of the oral tradition that is indigenous to Africa. Although the African short story remains unpopular relative to other forms of narrative if one considers the issue of literary criticism, it is none the less alive and well. Written in indigenous or European languages, the short story is published in the popular press or in elite literary journals, in collections of narratives or anthologies of African literature. The short story continues to thrive because of its liveness compared to the [sic] wieldy novel or play when it comes to publishing.

Ojaide names Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Barbara Kimenye, Alex LaGuma, Ben Okri, Sembene Ousmane, and Tanure Ojaide, among others, as the African short story’s best



known practitioners. He argues that like the novel the short story form “equally articulates and gives expression to the African experience in both colonial and postcolonial societies” (ibid: 22).

African short stories use diverse narrative modes to express the African condition. Writers use modes ranging from irony as in Achebe’s stories and fantasy as in Ben Okri to the surrealism in Kojou Laing’s stories. In these writers and newer short story writers’ works, there is constant blending of the highly realistic with the supernatural to express the human experience of modern Africans still deeply affected by traditional beliefs or postmodern concerns. (ibid: 22)

Ojaide’s engagement with the contemporary short story debriefs African literature’s poor relations with the genre. Although the short narrative has been reduced to the cheap enclave of children literature, it replicates the “discontinuous and disconcerting realities of African life,” (Ibid: 23). The genre’s origin and development underwrites the cardinal values African people place on story-telling.

Lindfors (2011) associates the predominance of short story writing in Africa, South of Sahara with the South African 1950s ‘Black literary movement’. According to Lindfors (2011:21) the South African short story enjoyed a “short happy life” between 1951 and 1963. Lindfors ascribes the writers’ growing fascination with the genre to the vicious political and social climate of the country. The circumstances were conducive to short story writing such that it “forced black writers to adopt a short term morality,” (Lindfors, 2011:22). He adds:

They had to live from day to day. Everything you do must be done today. Only today is important. You cannot budget for six months in order to write a novel. The short story, therefore, serves an urgent, immediate, intense, concentrated form of unburdening yourself - and you must unburden yourself, (ibid: 22).

Thus the genre’s “often simple” form; its brevity ... its “flexible, unpretentious, and sound literary form” became its source of “power and appeal,” (Ojaide, 2013:23). Marquard (1978) collected some South African short stories which he edited into an anthology that Trump (1993) re-edited to another edition. Michael Chapman (2004) re-worked the Trump’s edition into an *Omnibus of a Century of South African Short Stories*. These anthologies endeared the South African canon of the short story to the students, academia and the wider public so much that the stories remain part of South Africa’s complex and contested literary canon today.

Even though the genre broadens the canon of both African and South African literature it remains an eclipsed minority canon of African literature. The genre “undermines the prevailing critical reading of South African literature of the late apartheid period, while revising the parameters of canonicity to include minority literatures,” (Fainman-Frenkel, 2006:67). Fainman-Frenkel contends that the short story canon destabilises conservative understanding of African literary canon principally because it clouds the oppositional relationship between “local and global, place and displacement, margin and centre, minority and majority by invoking the ordinary in non-normative positionalities” (ibid: 67).

However, Nkosi (cited in Lindfors, 2011) has a different perception of the phenomenon. He blames the writers themselves for failing to create a “more substantial literature,” (Lindfors, 2011:22). Nkosi accuses the writers of sheer laziness for not producing lengthier works. He indicts the magazines such as *The Drum* for encouraging the publication of “low standard” short story corpus, (ibid: 22). He wonders how writers could “detour from the long and dreary labour of good writing by bashing out a short story in a matter of a day or two and getting it published immediately,” (ibid: 22). Nkosi’s loathness of the short genre mirrors the prevailing scholarly attitude and resentment toward the genre across the continent. The genre is perceived to have deleterious effects on the prose form and content whose best quality the novel epitomises.

The somewhat fair reception and representation of the South African short story canon creates a fertile premise for the present study to negotiate the place of the Zimbabwean counterpart within its canon. The challenge, though, is to decide how the canon can be implemented without completely crumbling the foundation established by the mainstream canon. Given that the contemporary short story offers students a global perspective, it is incumbent upon this research to reclaim the genre’s importance.

While consensus seems to exist about the African short story’s folkloric oral traditional origination, discontent ensues pertaining to whose tradition; the African or the Western. Europhile philanthropies, like Larson, Jean De Grandsaigne, and Poe view the African short story as a successfully modified version of the traditional Western form. Larson (1970: xiii) is patent that:

The African writer has not been wholly content to leave the short story the way he found it. Rather, as with other forms of African writing, he has stretched it a bit by

injecting a healthy dose of his own cultural and aesthetic values into a traditional western genre and created in the process a frequently new and radical different form.

Larson's school of thought surmises that prior to the advent of colonialism Africans had no stable or pristine cultural modes of their own to derive value systems from. They had no story of their own to tell. Against this backdrop Julien (1981; 1992; 2011) and Roscoe (1971) challenge Larson's deployment as simplistic and domineering by propagating the intrinsic value of an African short story within African cultural hegemony. Julien (1992) decries Larson critique as an erstwhile philanthropic heritage notorious for exerting old-age ideological weight of Western asceticism on African value systems. She contests that if an African story, simple as it is, is a borrowed phenomenon, then the African culture, whose essential force is African's point of reference, loses its relevance. Elsewhere, she belittles as "an impoverished paradigm" (Julien, 2011:1) or "ornamentalism" (Julien, 1992:1) any assumption within Western and even African scholarship that perceives African art-forms as "derivative, that is, Europe develops the form and Africa (Asia and Latin America) only supply content," (Julien 1992:1). Julien (1983) sets to correct what she perceives as misapprehension about the Africanness of the African short story by emphasising the salient features that make the genre a precedent of the traditional folktale. She contends that critics should ignore the aspects of literary criticism that deprecate the African genre to a "unique manifestation of western culture," (Julien, 1983:148). She reproaches critical scholarship that focuses on elements of literary criticism; "characterisation, theme, plot and/or form or on the influence of one upon the other," (ibid: 148) to comprehend the African short story genre. These attitudes are responsible for the short story's relegation from the mainstream canon, since the genre appears insignificant compared to the novel.

In a similar fashion, Roscoe (1971) refuses Westernised dictates that reduce artefacts of authentic African origination to peripheral creativity. He believes that the African short story is a natural outgrowth of the indigenous African tradition, (ibid: 7). He commends that many African writers including poets, novelists and dramatists have naturally worked with the short story "in response to the pull of their home tradition," (Ibid: 79). The present study, however, finds Roscoe's position somewhat problematic. He considers the short story as the training ground for the more purposeful and wieldier novel. The novel is perceived as the epitome of creative writing superstructure in canonical terms. This is a position the current study seeks to oppose.

The contentious views of Larson, Julien and Roscoe serve as preliminary review for studying several fundamental aspects of African short story. How does the short story relate to the traditional folktale? What differences and/or similarities in narrative structure exist between the short story and the conservative but wieldy novel? What makes the short story distinctive? The rallying point for this project is; what is the primary discourse force of African narratology? The thesis of the present inquiry is also to explore the contemporary short story's metamorphosis through adaptation, hybridity, and polyvalence to attain its present state where it seeks to subdue the canonically conservative novel. The genre's unprecedented fermentation in recent years across Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular offers substance of interesting research about the state of African literature today.

Although the genre is imperceptible in scholarly deliberations, it is, however, "live and well," (Ojaide, 2013:22) in the contemporary space. Alluding to its newsworthy visibility in the modern African literary horizon, Ojaide (2013:23) elicits:

The short story has generated interest through the Caine Prize for African Writing specifically meant for the short story. As has been happening, many writers known for their novels, poetry, and drama are writing short stories on a more popular scale. Dike Okoro-edited *Speaking for the Generations: Contemporary Short Stories from Africa* is one of the most recent anthologies and includes some well-known writers such as Benjamin Kwakye, Odun Balogun, and Tanure Ojaide and younger ones as Ayobami Adebayo, Prince Mensah, and Khadija El Younossi. The stories capture different vignettes of the contemporary life from all corners of the continent. Helon Habila also has put together a wide range of short stories in *The Granta Book of the African Short Story* that includes old and late writers like the South African Alex La Guma and the Zimbabwean Dambudzo Marechera and living writers such as the Nigerian Uwem Akpan. It is interesting to note that many of the younger writers live in the West [diasporic writers] and many of their stories too are set in the West and not in Africa. Those living in the West or have their stories set in the West include Aminatta Forna, Uwem Akpan, and E.C. Osondu. These short story writers are not concerned about the nation but about individuals and society, pushing to the background political and national issues.

Given the proliferation of the short story genre it augurs well to question whether or not 'real' African literature dwells within the intermittently "poor and extemporaneous" literary mass, (Gates, 1990:179). Does the survival of the short genre not make it accede to the position of power relative to the novel? Will not the circumscription of its purview strengthen the traditional canonist attitudinal perception that lived daily experiences are cheap, 'art for art's sake' or popular aesthetics?

Purveyors of African literary canon, the Makerere Conference gurus underwrite the constellation of values that encode the utilitarian nature of African literature. They define African literature as a function of the history of and against imperialism (Ngugi, 1986) whereby the writer's vocation is exclusively a decolonisation construct. The urge to ascribe intellectualism to 'aesthetic' value of 'popular culture' sounds misguided and unAfrican to elitist canonists. This study, however, maintains that real African literature is produced outside the high classroom or institutional culture. The research questions African literary canon's autonomy in writing. Its thesis does not, however, undervalue the centrality of the ideology of debating colonialism and decolonisation of the African text. The study places great depth of value on African autonomous story-telling tradition which withstood the test and movement of time, surviving not only the historical threat of colonial loss and canonical displacement but also the throes and will power of technology. The autonomous nature and teleological development of the short story present an interpretative enigma worth of study. This study, therefore, searches "the source of power and appeal" (Ojaide, 2013:22) of the Zimbabwean short story. The uniqueness of this approach rests on Magosvongwe's (2008) argument that the genre is primarily Zimbabwean. Zimbabweans are story-telling people and Zimbabwe has always been "a story-telling country." In a blogosphere that runs under the auspices of "*Unofungei? Fungai blog*," Magosvongwe posted the reflection;

Zimbabwe, indeed, is a short story country. The canonical trend setters of Zimbabwean literature escaped the throttling grip, noose and net of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau via the short story. The brevity and incisiveness of the short story has allowed many a Zimbabwean to capture the defining moments in Zimbabwean history with considerable ease. (Magosvongwe, 23 October, 2008, web)

Magosvongwe's online remark suggests that since Zimbabweans are story-telling people, they live socially storied lives. Wherever there is a Zimbabwean, (and an African, by extension,) there is a story to tell. Grandsaigne and Spackey (Ariel, 15, 2, 73) concede, "Be it tales or legends, man has always loved to tell stories."

The online reflection initiates the present research's interests on the short story, vis-à-vis its etymology, canonicity, (or lack of it) and its subsequent resurgence within the contemporary scene. The study questions whether Magosvongwe insinuates that Zimbabwe exclusively owns the genre or, conversely, the genre owns Zimbabwean, Chirere (2013, 20 March 2013, web). What is the cradle of the genre? When and how did the short story become

Zimbabwean? The question of the primacy of the genre in typological interpretation of African literature is also imperative. The following exposition of literature review problematises the influence of technology on the growth of the short story.

#### **2.2.1.2 Canon of the Contemporary Cybernetic African literature**

Ojaide's (2012) collection of essays underscores the value of other emergent disciplines that impact upon modern African literature today. African literature, "more than ever before ... now carries so many issues that were once thought to be far from it," (Ojaide, 2012: xi). This uniqueness manifests in contemporary literature's expression of what Ojaide terms the 'African condition.' In an online undergraduate Africana Studies course outline developed at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Ojaide consents:

African literature is ever-growing and getting more diversified in formal, thematic, and technical explorations. There is much experimentation in forms and techniques across the genres but the contemporary African writer however exposed is still rooted in an Africanity that blends borrowed with indigenous traditions for something uniquely African in a changing world. There is much diversity of themes as writers get bolder in their treatment of subjects. For instance, in more recent African literature there is treatment of sexuality, homosexuality, and other themes that used to be taboo. At the same time, there are explorations of ecological and environmental subjects as never before. As a dynamic medium, African literature will continue to evolve, carrying along the complexities that make the African reality, (Ojaide, 2013:5. Web).

The resurgence of the short story genre in the 1990s has become the most powerful compelling force to rethink the transcendence of African literary canon. The imperative for a shift of focus in canonical greatness is the growing realisation that the advent of multi-media technologies enriches a conversation about the literary value of such issues as "contact zones, borderlands and hybridity that support the idea that all texts have contexts and all of them are about cultural contact with other modes of being and behaviour" (Bona and Maimi, 2006:14). This factor of the transfiguration of the contemporary African literature excites new debates about the Place and status of 'popular culture.' The thesis of the present study is that canon debates should evade transcendent notions of African literary canon as the proverbial ivory towers distinct from the ordinary everyday life.

Ojaide explores the influence of trans-migration and globalisation on African literature in the context of post-coloniality and world literatures. Interestingly, Ojaide does not consider

global influence as “extra-literary but valid materials for literary creations and so intrinsic to the literature,” (2012: xi). For Ojaide, the articulation of the impact of global and multi-media technologies on the ‘contemporary African condition’ involves the following contentious questions:

What new directions are there in very recent literary publications by Africans at home and outside? What influence has globalization had for good or bad on contemporary African literature? ... As far as globalization is concerned, one should look at how new writings in Africa are influenced by the Internet, blogging, Facebook, and other forms of popular media. How is the language of texting, emailing, and others affecting new writings? One can say that there is an Internet-based literature in Africa with publications of mainly poems and short stories online or in online literary magazines such as *The New African Literature*. There is thus a publication market online. There is little yet of hypertext as in the West but this could become current at any time. It appears that Internet publishing is challenging the traditional mode of publishing, especially as genres are concerned with hybrid works. All these developments are taking place in the face of self-publishing because of the dearth of professional publishers in Africa and the low rate of the reading culture in most countries. (Ojaide, 2012:23).

Ojaide evaluates the “multiple ways that the new realities in Africa, including the ramifications for the media of globalization, are impacting on younger writers,” (Ojaide, 2012: xi). The locus of his interrogation is the extent to which modern African literature co-exists with the effects of globalization and the new media culture. Ojaide (2012: xi) writes:

The book is conceived under the premise that literature is a cultural production, a point repeated in many chapters. With this premise comes the acceptance of a utilitarian function of literature as of the other artistic creations of African peoples. Thus, it is the belief of the author of this book that literary criticism has an ethical function and so relates that ethical function to how literature can affect the society and its readers for the better. The chapters on globalisation ... are written from the viewpoint that literature should sharpen the consciousness of its people and readers for a better world. For instance, the writer and literary critic should defend their culture in an age of globalisation and inscribe it into the cultures of the world.

He challenges critics to “generate a new form of criticism of African literature in general and also inspire writers to know the traditions from which they write as they affirm their own individuality while not forgetting the Africanity of their works,” (ibid: xii). The present research responds to Ojaide’s vocation to critics to vouch for the Afro-global trend of scholarship. The study analyses the impact of the multi-media and the internet in shaping literacy texts, vis-à-vis the short story. This is a critical area of evaluation yet to emerge for Zimbabwean literature. A review of the trends, innovation and development of modern Zimbabwean literature and its criticism reveals that the question of the influence of global

culture on its literature is a grey area. Zimbabwean critics still consider literary and artistic developments within the cyber community as “extra-literal,” a euphemism for Kahari’s (1986) “art-for art’s sake.” The present exposition seeks to foreclose this anomaly. The gap is too yawning for all to query.

The global village concept conveniently expedites the re-generation of the current short story proliferation, whose form is conducive to new multi-media and the cyber space publication. The innovativeness and assertiveness of the present research, therefore, rests in its shift of attention from the traditional canon debate saddled chiefly on orality and literacy dichotomy to assessing the impact of new multi-media technologies on African creativity.

African critics such as Achebe (1964); Okpewho (1982); Ngugi (1986); Soyinka (1989, 1992, 2006); Ojaide (1995); Chiwome (1996); Lindfors (2002); Adu-Gyamfi (2002) and Abiola and Gikandi (2004) emphatically wrestled with the question of the Africanness of African literature. They ardently contest the relationship of language and literature, the orality/literacy binary, the role of the Artist in African politics and topical cultural matters that are intricately co-imbricated to designate African literature canonical. African canon debates, therefore, are belied by prospects of a purist or pristine African cultural hegemony. The issue of Africa’s existence; its history before, during and after the colonial imperialist presence is so intense in these debates that it blurs the artists’ critical impulse to look beyond it. The present engagement, however, quizzes whether the African culture can still be considered *sui generis*. Is it self-constitutive? In the wake of the globalisation, transmigration and multi-culturalism, is it accurate to valorise one cultural model as the blueprint of the literature of the African race?

According to Merolla (2014) orality versus literacy debate, which is saddled by dichotomies between the African Old World, and the Westernised New World (Kahari, 1986) obtains in a controversial equation. Merolla (2014:82) quizzes “if orality and tradition had to give way to literacy and modernity” as stated in the orality/literacy divide theory, then “the extinction of African cultural heritages could be foreseen.” Citing Ngugi and Wali as reference, Merolla observes:



Indeed, many writers and researchers approved of written African poems and novels, but worried about the waning of African oral heritages and cultures. Others opposed the idea that the only viable alternative was cultural and artistic expression through written literature largely produced in European languages and campaigned for the rapid “shift to literacy” of African languages and their adoption for creating national written literatures, (ibid: 82).

This study consents that African literary canon’s ideology’s will-power pulled the African critics to actively engage in the orality/literacy power differentiation contending to defend and/or preserve the vanishing of oral genres at the expense of nascent cultural trends in which the African text thrives. Paradoxically, the contemporary dispensation witnesses an unprecedented blossoming and revalorisation of these feared ‘vanishing’ genres proclaiming both national and international recognition. A case in point is the short story revival. This artistic burgeoning defies the conservative canonical mode of the African text. As Merolla contends; “Many contemporary cultural productions [short stories, songs, dance, theatre, videos etc.] belong to neither traditional nor ‘high’ written genres,” (ibid: 82). They engage other multi-media technologies for transmission and practice. Moolla (2012:447) observes a piecemeal process whereby “technological literacy” is threateningly sidestepping “paper literacy.” The internet facilitates a new cyber-community where the mutated oral-forms disseminate. Moolla has the contention that the literary use of the internet moves directly from the oral to the aural, sidestepping the written word which acts as “an analogue of oral media,” (ibid: 447).

Recent studies are gradually shifting their attention from the African ‘high’ canonical culture to the effects that the electronic media play in enabling new genres to emerge and old genres to adapt to modern technology, multiculturalism and global villagisation. Chief proponents are critics such as Liman, (2010); Kaschula and Mostert, (2011); Adenekan, (2012); Moolla, (2012) and Merolla, (2014). The contention is that recent technological developments might “shift the balance from print to audio” and cyber productions, (Merolla, 2014: 147). She advances:

Abstraction and the potential for conceptual thought occur in both the predominantly oral world and the world of print capitalism. However, the abstraction and conceptualisation produced within the framework of a predominantly oral society is qualitatively different from the abstraction and conceptualisation of print capitalism. Much work remains to be done on the transformation of worldview engendered by the transition from an oral to an aural world, ushered by the use of the internet, (ibid: 147).

It is within these recent trends of technological developments that the present research is predicated. Cognisant of the fact that orally transmitted African episteme change and adapt to contemporary times, this study focuses on the teleological development of the short story from the canon's neglect of the oral tradition to its current electronic mediated version. Oral story-telling informs other media and takes over "new roles in the political arena... in the tourist market and in the artistic field with refined forms of entertainment and education," to become an internet genre (Merolla, 2014:80). Thus this study is inspired by the growing wave of the new scholarship that is yet to be realised in Zimbabwean literature.

This wave of scholarship emerges out of the realisation that short story, initially side-lined as non-canonical, has mutated through adaptation and hybridity to become an independent and distinct genre. The emergence of this new genre that retains a loose connection to the canonical novel maintains a certain autonomy that deserves attention and a myriad of exploratory research. As Liman (2010:131) discerns:

Whatever the case, [short story] culture is usually seen as [a] tradition bound with little or no capacity to modernise. It is located in communal societies that are characterised by simple agrarian social structures. In these types of societies cognitive processes are based on age-old experiences of elders in society. Knowledge production is carried out through informal traditional methods of apprenticeship and mentoring. All available knowledge is acquired through experience and is committed to memory rather than documented.

It is the thesis of this study that creativity cannot be stifled by canonical ideological machinations. It has the potential for growth and can outburst in the face of such hostilities. Vambe's (2010:2-3) postulation is well-placed:

Creative literary cultures, unlike political institutions ... are less amenable to total destruction even in the face of the most brutal and dictatorial regimes. The possibilities that creative cultures can be manipulated by the tyrant can never be doubted and in post-independence Zimbabwe, the scars of abuse of creativity by the ruling elites abound. However, creative literary cultures work with their own logic; the fact of a social, political and economic meltdown can be the suitable condition of possibility of rebirth of creative art that interrogates the slide. This means that creative cultures can authorise their own narrative pattern in the ways that confirm and interrogate the conditions of the country and the arts.

This research discusses the interaction and mutation of the canonically subjugated short story genre within the cyber-space, (internet/electronic related communities) to authorise the resurgence of their own form. The present study argues that the African/Zimbabwean short story, that had been poised for literature's last laugh, escaped the throttling grip of the

Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau's (SRLB's) canon through hybridisation of its oral, written and multi-media forms.

Liman (2010:133) conceptualises multimedia as “originally a personal computer terminology, designating its multiple applications in not only the processing of data, figures and letters, but sounds and images.” Articulating the orature and multimedia interplay, Liman concentrates on how universal electronic media devices are in creating spaces for all sorts of experimentation with old oral forms. He considers how songs featured as sound tracks in contemporary Hausa soyayya video films give old forms a new lease of life:

The new artists who composed their songs in the studio with the aid of computer software, pianos, mixers and synthesisers have also been dipping their hands into the rich repertoire of old Hausa folk songs and traditions with a view to modernising them by wrapping them with modern musical instruments. This style of modernisation has been used by film producers who transposed and adapted folk narratives texts into films (Liman, 2010:134).

The modernisation of traditional Hausa oral songs exemplifies the recasting of oral forms- (short stories incorporated) into new forms that are neither oral nor written. This new cultural process has emerged on contemporary African cultural horizon through “hybridity, polyvalence and fusion” whose globalising forces are the different “devices of electronic media and multimedia technologies,” (ibid: 134). Liman challenges African scholars and researchers to focus attention on the “increasing interplay of traditional oral arts and modern media technology as is manifested in different African societies,” (ibid: 135).

In as much as we concur with these sentiments, the present research focuses on the issues of canonisation and institutionalisation of African short story in general and Zimbabwean, in particular. The preoccupation is with the short story in its oral, written and electronic form whose flourishing nourishment is technically due to the technological advancement currently bequeathed to the writers by electronic media and globalisation. Currently, the e-story has reclaimed the oral nature of its antecedent, the folktale. The contemporary short story version's transformation through new processes of “hybridity, polyvalence and fusion,” has consequences for an understanding of the African literary canon (Liman, 2010:134). The present study quizzes whether this transformation is not a creation of a new phenomenon of the African canon. Thus, the transformation inspires heated debates about the literary value of

the short story within the extant canon. Is the African literary canon not meant to be revised? Is it not an imprecise process that must continuously evolve to enable the contemporary literature to be read in its complex contexts? Is the short story genre changing within the virtual literary continuum?

### **2.3 Zimbabwean Literature and the problem of Canon**

A review of the Zimbabwean literary canon is basically an outline and critique of the growth of its literature and criticism. Zimbabwean literature cherishes an influential canon comprising both indigenous African languages and English language writers, albeit, male dominated. As an outcrop of the African literary canon Zimbabwean literature produced prominent writers in the mould of Patrick Chakaipa, Paul Chidyausiku, Solomon Mutswairo, Dambudzo Marechera, Yvonne Vera, Charles Mungoshi, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chenjerai Hove, and Shimmer Chinodya. Most of them gained international recognition alongside prolific African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and Ezekiel Mphahlele. International recognition justifies the contention that Zimbabwean literature is a key component of African literature. The development of the criticism of Zimbabwean literature might be a piecemeal process but its output is considerably steady. The predominantly English language constructed criticism, (a non-indigenous language,) features as collection of essays, chapters in anthologies, journal articles or conference papers. In fictional terms, these works delineate the historical development of the much wieldier novel. The short story genre has grossly been overlooked necessitating some nagging critical questions concerning its literary value.

The present study's commission into the Zimbabwean literary canon is predicated on the evolution of its literature and criticism. The imperative for such an enquiry erupts out of the realisation that the study of Zimbabwean literature relentlessly, though somewhat unwittingly, evaluates the validation of its canon. However, neither a systematic canon nor short story review fulminates in previous appreciation of Zimbabwean literature. The literature at our disposal reveals that even though the canon controversy has been raised in discussions about Zimbabwean literature, it has not been a wholesale undertaking, prompting this exploratory research. To redress this fragmentation, this thesis precedes from Coullie and Gibbon's (1996:16) argument that canonicity is an issue of "particular sensitivity and

contestation” in literary studies, especially where “literary fields are relatively new and still developing.” Since Foucault, communities of knowledge have treaded cautiously, albeit in a process that is “neither neutral nor value free” (ibid; 16) issues relating to canonicity, canon-formation or canonical disciplines set up in literary fields of study. Thus the study reviews works about the historical-cum-teleological development of Zimbabwean literature from the colonial epoch to the contemporary context. Major critical breakthroughs will also be swotted.

The matter of the Zimbabwean literature, as a fairly recent mid-twentieth century phenomenon, has been a subject of discussion in major deliberations informing its canon. That it was occasioned by the advent of Western colonial print technology professedly designating basic ‘literacy’ to Africans cannot be denied. However, it cannot be ascertained whether the canon was a direct British colonial imposition or a creation by the academia, (analogous to the African American concept of canon as ‘formation’). Obtaining here is a diametrical polarisation of ideologies. Some critics such as Chiwome (1996) and Chapman (2003) contend that the European-induced ‘literacy,’ purported to scale up to global heights the ostensibly stagnant African literary traditions. The colonially sponsored Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau (SRLB) is accused of having played to the gallery by imposing a Western literary tradition as canon. Thus, SRLB orthodoxies, patent for their institutionalisation of culturally biased European literary critical formalism, presumably papered the Zimbabwean literary tradition. This view portrays Zimbabwean literary canon as an imposed Western canonical heritage. Within this fragmentation, the SRLB harboured standoffish ambivalence that echoes a tacit acceptance of the colonialist’s lordship over the African literary canon.

The other polemical view accuses early African critics and scholars as responsible for regulating the criteria for determining the literary value of the texts they canonised. The urge to redefine the evaluative process of Zimbabwean literature soon after independence presented scholars with a complex task of deciding the nature of the inceptive canon’s outlook, (Kahari, 1990). Kahari’s bibliography documents his noticeable exertion in setting the benchmark for enlisting the work to be studied, researched or critiqued. He maps a trajectory of the rise of Shona literature that formed the Zimbabwean literary canon. Kahari’s

postulation conjures Guillory's idea that canon-formation is a problem of "the constitution and distribution of cultural capital [and] ... access to the means of literary production and consumption," (Guillory, 1993: ix). The University of Rhodesia, formerly The College of the University of London, played a major role in regulating access to literary production. Within its echelons were the schools; primary, secondary and tertiary learning centres that introduced literacy through their practice of reading and writing.

This project inaugurates a critical inquiry into the institutional context conditioning the constitution and distribution of the early Zimbabwean literary canon. To evade the superficial tendency of lashing solely at the SRLB hierarchy, the study also probes the community of academia's critical aversion of the short story as a condition of genre's deracination from the mainstream canon. The intricacies of Chiwome and Kahari's ideological positions create a complex interlaced notion of canon worth interrogation. The overarching project of this study is an inquiry into the subtleties of Europhile SRLB literary canons, on one hand and the school and other learning institutions authorising the forms of syllabi or curricular to be studied, on the other. Their misgivings relegated the short story corpus from the canon, a condition that continues to hound Zimbabwean literature several decades after decolonisation attempts, revealing the paradoxical [dis]orientation of the modern literary tradition.

### **2.3.1 Zimbabwean Literary Canon as Western imposed Tradition**

Early critics charge that the inherited British colonial educational elitism indelibly imprinted its cultural legacies on the Zimbabwe's literary canon; (Zhuwarara, 1990; Chiwome, 1994, 1996; Shizha, 2005, 2006, 2006a, 2011, 2013 and Hungwe, 1994). Consequently, the canonical orientation of Zimbabwean literature was conditioned by the dictates of the imperialist educational institutions and structures. This board of literature offers the historical background informing the Zimbabwean literary canon. Mungazi, (1991) and Hungwe (1994) consider the development and administration of African education in the colony as an adjunct of the presidency of the Director of Education, whose reign lasted until 1927 when the Department of Native Education was inaugurated under the auspices of the Native Affairs Department, (NAD) from 1923 to 1979. The Director of the Department of Native Education, George Stark, 1934 – 1954, aligned his policy along the general NAD's policy of segregation

and limited African educational development. Mungazi (1991:1) intimates that Stark designed “a policy of practical training and tribal conditioning” whose long term consequences ricochet in the current educational systems. As a White Rhodesian administering the NAD’s white supremacist dogmata, Stark was predominantly anxious about a phenomenon the Rhodesians considered as the ‘native problem.’

Widening the ‘native problem’ Keigwin writes, “Bearing in mind our underlying policy of segregation, let us consider anew the question of their education and industrial training,” (Keigwin, 1924:54-45). Similarly, Wilson, also a White Rhodesian, presented the dilemma of educating and training Africans thus:

The problem before us is not that of educating the native: it is to know what to do with him when we have educated him...That natives are being educated and will be educated... [He] cannot possibly be prevented from imbibing the knowledge of our arts and crafts even if we should forbid all native schools - that *is* the native problem, (Wilson, 1923:87).

Keigwin and Wilson’s presentation of the ‘native problem’ portray the unequivocal ramifications of the policy makers’ restricted structure of canon. The Department sanctioned a culture of subservience that the ‘native’ writers had to comply with to stay in circulation. Its arm was the Native Affairs Department Annual, (NADA) that operated from 1923 to 1979 as an English Language periodical responsible for reporting and recommending matters of ‘native’ administrative concern. Funded by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the journal published anthropological and ethnographic material that mythologised African people and their past. No literary work critical to the white minority hegemony would be acceptable to NADA periodicals except those that served their administrative purposes only.

As Jeater (1995) articulates, NAD resisted any prospects of learning from Africans. African culture was not analysed as a contemporary or changing phenomenon. The ‘native mind’ was not closely defined by these ‘native experts’. The native mind concept was taken as an aberration from the seminal Western consciousness. White administrators and missionaries could not make sense of African consciousness in European terms without shaking their own fundamental beliefs.

Hungwe (1994) and Shizha and Kariwo (2011) portray Zimbabwe’s education system and structure as merely inherited pastiches of Eurocentric literary models instituted towards the

end of the nineteenth century when the country became a British colony in 1890. Hungwe contends that successive Rhodesian governments sustained an educational policy dominated by Anglo-Saxon culture and the general enhancement of white supremacist hegemony. He acknowledges that white supremacist concerns influenced the colony's educational policy stretching from 1890 to 1980 colonial era. Hence Hungwe (1994:4-5) remarks:

White settlers were influenced by a pervasive and deeply held belief in white supremacy. This resulted in the development of a complex educational policy which sought to guarantee white privilege, while at the same time promoting limited and segregated African development...It was in pursuance of this policy that the racially segregated educational system of Rhodesia evolved. In a territory where Africans formed a large and rapidly increasing majority, the provision of an efficient education system was expected to secure the future of the settlers.

In a manner reminiscent of Hungwe, Shizha and Kariwo (2011) perceive the inceptive education system as a component of the colonial project to dehumanise Africans by imposing both inner and outer colonisation. For them, formal education in colonial Zimbabwe was a creation and product of a foreign dominant culture. They document that the education system

...was formulated and structured around the nineteenth century British middle- class education system, which had a hegemonic and demonising effect on indigenous education system. [The system] turned into master narratives...sought by every individual who desired 'a good life'. The imposed hegemonic culture disrupted the values of pre-settler and pre-colonial notions of learning ... [that] were essential in reflecting the social and cultural needs and expectations of the community. The arrival of European colonialism in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, led to the perforce imposition of European or colonial worldview, which was largely responsible for not only the deliberate distortion of the traditional projects of education already in place but also of the indigenously based and comprehensive programmes of development that were achieved and put in place over hundreds of years, (Shizha and Kariwo, 2011:14).

Thus these sociologists-cum historians cited above argue that the viability of African cultural world-view was never considered an essential element for crafting an education policy for the African race. Building from the same premise, early critics of Zimbabwean literature hypothesise that the colonial education system, as background to the solemnisation of Zimbabwean literary canon, was a terrain of contestation institutionalised by domination and subordination. Kahari (1990:184 -189) chronicles early black Zimbabwean "authors as ideologues" to show how the education policy reduced the indigenous African languages and literature into a matrix of pacification. Kahari archives the principal ideas and beliefs that characterise a given group of writers. According to Kahari's histories of 'first generation'



writers, Patrick Chakaipa, born in 1932, was a Roman Catholic Reverend whose priesthood was ordained at Chishawasha Seminary. He studied Western thoughts through “psychology, logic, philosophy...theology and ethics in the light of African customs and law...” His subsequent works; *Karikoga Gumiremiseve*, (1958); *Pfumo reropa*, (1961); *Rudo Ibofu* (1961); *Garandichauya*, (1963) and *Dzasukwa Mwana asina Hembe*, (1967) echo his western ideological orientation. The first two novels romanticise the African past. His latter publications philosophise the effects of industrialisation, and urbanisation with a strong Western Christian religious and moral inclination. Mawere (2010:3) supports Kahari by asserting that:

The Priest cum teacher...denigrates African traditional religion. On one hand, this was because he was a staunch believer of the new religion - Christianity. On the other hand, this was because before the attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 (like elsewhere in Africa), works that were explicitly critical of colonialism were heavily censored. Many writers were forced to dwell on ‘innocent’ topics such as love affairs, migration to the city and others that denigrated African traditional religion and practices.

Chapman (2003:306) argues that paradoxically, the ‘native’ came to regard his own indigenous African language as an obsolete resemblance of “traditional rural backwardness” associated with the old, “uneducated rural folk.”

Paul Chidyausiku, born in 1927, was an Agriculturalist in the Rhodesian dispensation. He later became an editor, initially with *Moto*, a Shona magazine before joining the Literature Bureau editorial staff. (Kahari; opcit; 185) His indeterminacy and ambiguity about the African world view manifests in his novels; *Nhoroondo dzokuwanana* (1959); *Pfungwa DzaSekuru Mafusire* (1960); *Nyadzi dzinokunda rufu* (1962) and *Karumekangu* (1970). Chidyausiku’s protagonist, Sekuru Mafusire, in *Pfungwa DzaSekuru Mafusire*, for instance, subverts African culture that he should be its custodian. His other novels universalise and poke fun at infidelity, greedy and such ignoble vices reflective of industrialisation and urbanisation’s social ills. Interestingly, Chidyausiku, in Chakaipa’s fashion, uses his characters to echo his subordinating intentions to the readers, mostly young people. This prompted Mawere (2007) to observe that characterisation was a powerful literary device employed by first generation Shona writers to convey their messages. The character, as an individual rather than a representation of the history, culture and society, was the most effective nineteenth century British literary ruse for alienating the writers from their cultural

base. Character, therefore, became the principal element of early writers' literary creativity. Character development became the primary focus of writers of lengthy novels.

Kahari notes that Solomon Mutswairo was born in 1924 to a Salvation Army officer and missionary in Southern Rhodesia. He trained as a teacher at Howard institute before enrolling for secondary education in South Africa. He was awarded a scholarship to read for a BSc at Fort Hare in 1953. As a teacher, he latter organised the African Language Development Association, a forerunner of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau. (Kahari; opcit 187-8) He furthered his studies until he attained a PhD in 1980. Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso*, (1956); *Murambiwa Goredema*, (1959); and *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978) echo the quest for recovering and celebrating Africa's past as a burning issue. Enlightened by the level of his education his works resonate with the "desire to refute the White man's fraudulent claims that the Black man had no history and no culture to speak of," (Zhuwarara, 1987: 132). Like colonialism, it would appear the church in Africa had sponsored some of her [the church] fiercest critics, as is explicit in Solomon Mutswairo's '*Mapondera*': '*Soldier of Zimbabwe*.'

Kahari's list of "authors as ideologues" goes on, (ibid: 183-189). Kahari's review stipulates that the authors' educational background, social and political views as well as their institutional affiliations form the meaning of the literature they produced. Chiwome (1994) shares Kahari's conviction. He underwrites the idea of a pitiable indigenous African languages canon emerging as a subordinated slide-show of the dominant colonialist canon's grand task of cultural annihilation, spiritual cum psychological training as well as alignment of the native body. He blames the colonial-cum-missionary education for shaping the direction early writers toured. Chiwome (1996) also probes the Literature Bureau's agency in literary production. The colonial education's concerted system reduced early African writers to missionaries-cum-teachers, Agriculturalists, and many other civil servants who, consciously or unconsciously, became assistants servicing the Bureau's grand project of African cultural assault. Mapara (2007:36) asserts that the failure by the first generation African creative writers to maintain a balanced relationship between Western values and the indigenous ones "is predicated by the thorough censorship of (their) literary works during the colonial era." They failed to re-orient their perception from the Western thought processes that negatively impacted upon their consciousness. Asante (2001: xiv) reiterates:

Europe's intervention in Africa was the beginning of the most nefarious images, the black labelling of Africans and their 'philosophies.' An African invented for European purposes could no longer serve the interests of its own people.

According to Olga (2009) the 1967 radicalisation of the segregation policy of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) intensified the censor. Olga finds support in Mapara's (2007:36) argument that "a new Censorship and Entertainment control Act," was instituted to monitor publications. Mapara (2007:36) furthers that:

A substantial collection of books by first generation writers, (Shamuyarira, Samkange, Sithole, Vambe and Mutasa) was banned and the indigenisation of black writing was promoted. Thus writing in the vernacular languages remained a native affair from the white Rhodesian standpoint. Any serious subject was required (to be written) in the English language and blacks were discouraged from this sort of expression. The new policy seemed to reinforce the construction of the racist image of the Africans as downright stupid.

Gaidzanwa (2003) portrays the historicity of the Zimbabwean canon as heavily shaped and constrained by the values and aspirations of white racial elitism determined to maintain its ideological dominance over all the cultural values of the ethnic groups in the country. She observes the British colonial cum missionary educational orthodoxies as responsible for the perversions and ambivalences inherent in Zimbabwean canon. Gaidzanwa (2003:1) writes:

Religion had a strong influence on education in Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Together with the colonial state, religious organisations, particularly missions influenced the form, content and the processes of canon formation in African artistic and intellectual endeavours.

Kahari, Chiwome and Gaidzanwa's projection of the colonially induced educational curricular informs this thesis' pursuance of the short story canon. It is imperative to revisit their idea of an inherited canon. Kahari and Chiwome's respective critiques of Zimbabwean fiction focus exclusively on the novel. The short story remains an insignificant other. Gaidzanwa interrogates canon-formation as a function of gender segregation. Her contention is that:

Through formal westernised education, pioneered by the church and subsidised by the state, women in many parts of Africa experienced a separation between religion, politics and the economy, disempowering them substantially and domesticating them in the process of restructuring labour and its distribution in colonial economies, (ibid: 1).

The absence of the short fictional genre within their canon debates is not incidental. Chapman argues that much writing in the indigenous African languages assumed:

...a sycophantic attitude toward the white man, his power, his *[typographical]* technology, and his religion, that is a ritualistic unquestioning acceptance of Christianity and a mixture of self-abasement and inconsistency in the description of African belief and mores, (Chapman, 2003:157).

The writers' "sycophantic attitude" sprouted out of their authorial expedience to preserve the Bureau's conservative convictions. It was nurtured by the wanton imposition of Europhile literary models "that were remote from story-telling of the African Oral tradition," (ibid: 157).

### **2.3.1.1 The Literature Bureau's agency in canonical imposition**

Accounting for the rise of Zimbabwean literature in indigenous African languages, Chiwome nurtures a historical developmental paradigm to discredit the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau for its historically polarised colonial legacy that reinforces African cultural annihilation. Prior to writing, [erroneously encrypted as 'literacy'] Zimbabwean literature thrived as orature, the Shona people's verbal art whose oral mode of dissemination had evolved out of their collective internal creative dynamism (Chiwome, 1994). The unwritten oral compendium was never accorded any worthy place within the SRLB's Eurocentric canonical tradition. Elsewhere, Chiwome (2007:159) perceives oral cultural heritage as "exploratory creativity," a view that consolidates the present study's positing that orature in general, and the short story in particular, is the fountainhead of Zimbabwean literature.

Zimbabwe's indigenous literature that incepted as Doke's 1931 handmaiden effort to standardise Shona orthography ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, (SRLB) in 1954 under the auspices of the Native Affairs Department (Chiwome, 1994, 1996). According to Whitehead (2003), the development of orthography as a tool for Africa to compete on the global literary arena presaged the inauguration of the London based 'International Institute of African Languages and Culture,' (IILALC) in 1926. The institute's primary aim was to study the link between languages and mental culture of the African native. The *Wikipedia*, a free content online version of the encyclopaedia, describes the IILALC operations as inclusive of instituting seminars, journals, monographs, edited volumes aimed at stimulating scholarship within Africa. As Whitehead (2003) articulates, the institute's forebears felt endowed with a vision to envisage the 'desired orthography' for African languages presumed to grant Africans a sanctum for global literary

acceptance. The IALC initiative endeavoured to transform African oral cultures into literary ones. Whitehead insists that the institute's proposed standardised writing system would mutually enrich African cultures to conform to western world's literary culture.

The IALC spearheaded the formation of African Bureaux of Literature across the continent. It is through the International Institute of African Language and Culture's mentorship that the Rhodesia Literature Bureau (RLB) inceptioned in the 1930s as a surrogate canonical board for federate states of Nyasaland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, present day Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia, respectively (Chapman, 2003:156). Established under the colonial federal government the Bureau operated as the joint publication of the federate state. Thus Clement Doke's 1931 concerted Standard Shona orthography, believed to have presaged 'literacy' in Zimbabwe, was an outcrop of the IALC initiative. According to Kahari, following the establishment of his orthography, Doke advocated the launch of an Advisory Committee. The Zimbabwean Native Affairs Department, (NAD) acted upon Doke's request and the committee was set up whose first task was an attempted union "translation of the Bible in 1941," (Kahari, 1990:13). The Committee became defunct soon after the attempt and resuscitated as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, (SRLB) in 1954, (ibid: 13). Consequently, Doke's orthography accomplished the IALC's internationally acclaimed obligation to grand the African (Zimbabwean) illiterates the magic of letters. The International Institute of African Languages and Culture, therefore, became the editorial policy maker and marketing reality for African Literature Bureaux soon to emerge all over Africa as "marginalised stepdaughters of the traditional English Literature, which remains the queen mother of all its undernourished Anglophone offspring," (Lindfors, 1992:6).

As Doke's standard orthography became widespread in the growing imperial capital, Zimbabwean indigenous literary production inceptioned. Its amplification established a hierarchy of texts within the indigenous African languages turf, commencing with Shona and IsiNdebele imaginative writing in 1956 and English mediated writings a decade later (Chiwome, 1994). The promulgation of 'literacy' through writing propelled SRLB to institute a canon that either included or exclude, through a closed access system, written texts that conformed or did not to its master ideology. The SRLB became an indigenous literary marketplace regulating the production and consumption of literature.

To regulate the production of its canon, the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau conducted workshops for nascent writers, edited and recommended manuscripts ideal for publication. The reasons for recommending certain manuscripts at the expense of others were situated in their amenability to certain functions in transmitting and upholding the Bureau's tradition in linguistic representational terms. Chapman supports Chiwome's contention that the SRLB's indigenous languages-oriented policies reinforced the construction of a racialised African image as an aberration from the norm.

Chiwome argues that black Zimbabwean literature, therefore, did not become canonical of its own accord. There were agents (as much as they still are) involved in positioning and considering what is canonical. The body of black literature spawned was a result of the SRLB's explicit or implicit rules and value preferences alien to the people it expressed. Chiwome studies the complexities of literary visibility (or obscurity) within the SRLB turf as product of Walter Krog's ideological preferences and subjectivities about indigenous African languages literature. Krog's propensity for universalising indigenous African language education culminated in the present pitiable state of Zimbabwean literary canon.

#### **2.3.1.2 The Krog defined SRLB canon**

A plethora of critical work lampoons Walter Krog's commission to 'promote good literature' for African school-children, on behalf of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau. His agency is perceived as being tantamount to ensuring that "colonialism was given a politically correct profile" to curtail the potentially rebellious Africans (Chiwome, 2007:159). As Chiwome submits the hallmark of this so called 'good literature' was the mental and spiritual conditioning of the African child. The state-controlled Literature Bureau determined the criteria for exclusion and acceptability of indigenous languages literary works into its canon. According to Mutasa and Chigidi (2010:63) Krog supervised the development and distribution of literature in indigenous languages. They chronicle that:

Headed by Walter Krog, a former District Commissioner, the role of the Rhodesian Literature Bureau was to guide the development of literature in indigenous languages along lines acceptable to the government of the day.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau and a self-appointed surrogate patron of Zimbabwean indigenous African languages literary canon believed that the

indigenous literary canon had emerged in a context of absence of endemic replicas to serve as sources for inspiration:

Where can aspiring authors learn the art of writing? This is a thorny question. So far, our authors have taught themselves by trial and error. The Rhodesia Literature Bureau gives advice and constructive criticism to the authors of all the manuscripts sent in for assessment, (Krog, 1976:9).

Krog's apologetic yet contrite articles published between 1966 and 1982 document major activities of the Bureau. Gwekwerere (2013:1) has the contention that Krog's articles, written largely during his tenure as the editor of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau, "represent the earliest pieces of white critical thought on the black Zimbabwean novel." According to Krog (1966) the Bureau was curled out of the imperative objective to unify the various indigenous dialects into standard written form. It aimed to inculcate a reading habit and encourage creative writing in local languages. Krog maintains that the numerous languages of the federal states as well as the widespread illiteracy and poverty rate militated against possible readership culture among these 'aboriginals.' Krog apologetically contends that the inception of the Bureau, as a book agency, was prompted by the total lack of indigenous languages literature, a phenomenon that he decries as "literacy without literature," (Krog, 1979:1). African children in schools had no reading material written in indigenous languages. The effort to teach them to read and write was hindered by the absence of material with which they could practise their newly won skill. The Bureau, therefore, arose to redress this problem of 'literacy without literature.'

Krog set the embryonic indigenous languages literature on a controversial start. He accedes that the Bureau, whose publishing taboos were "politics and religion," aimed to "promote popular reading material, not to propagate political and religious view," (ibid: 3). Thus the Bureau took an as much ascetic stance against African religious and cultural beliefs as its frugal attitudes towards African politics. Veit-Wild quotes the NAD secretary for African education's 1977 remark:

In connection, I wish to stress that the function of the Bureau is to provide reading material, as adjunct to the education not to propagate political views. Proponents of the latter type of material have ready access to the international publishers, (Veit-Wild, 1993:246).

African political, cultural and religious beliefs as well as matters of racial prejudice were condemned as pitiable enclaves of fetishism and asceticism. Would-be novelists had to emulate Haggard's populist, materialist and conformist novel, *King Solomon's Mines*, (1885)

to be considered good. After all, indigenous African languages literature was an insignificant “adjunct to education” (Krog, 1966:8) only providing supplementary reading material to school children, hence, needed not be taken serious.

Sceptical of the indictments levelled against the cynical role of the Bureau on the African creative potential Krog (1979:3) remarks:

Some misinformed critics have gone so far as to maintain that African writers are compelled to send their work to the Bureau, which they claim, exercise a form of censorship. This allegation is patently absurd as any writer can obviously send his work to any publisher he chooses. It offers an extension service which the writer is free to make use of or not.

Yet, to maintain his meddlesome pretention Krog (1979:3) argues, “It is apparent that provided disruptive tribal cum political influences are resisted, there is tremendous future for vernacular writing in the new Zimbabwean Rhodesia.” Ironically, Krog confesses here that the Bureau’s principal task was to vet ‘vernacular’ manuscripts to ensure that no seditious art was published. Chiwome (2007:160) observes the contradictions inherent within the Bureau’s “principal task.” The African writer had to search for truth and “innovation through exploration of reality” that is ironically regulated by the “intellectually and creatively oppressive propagandist arm of government,” the Literature Bureau, (ibid: 160). Chiwome argues that the resultant literature, even in the post-colonial period, was characterised by submissiveness and silence. He questions how innovation would attain a place for experimentation by the same agents of education whose determination is to eradicate the prevailing African conservatism.

Chiwome’s assertion that the Bureau influenced the content, themes and the general ingression of the indigenous language expression, is a position popularised by a host of critics; Veit Wild, 1992; Chapman, 2003; Mapara, 2007 and Olga, 2009. For instance, Mapara (2007) posits that in his capacity as a Native Commissioner, Krog vetted all submissions on behalf of the Bureau to ensure strict adherence to its dictates. Publishers printed what the Bureau dictated or they risked losing their licences or their publications would be heavily censored and subsequently banned from the market if they did not comply. Olga (2009) notes that in order to maintain a liberal outlook the Bureau organised annual writing competitions with cash prizes for the winners. Olga résumés:

In its function as literary agent the Bureau evaluated manuscripts, edited them and sponsored their publication by commercial houses. It also set up retail outlets all



over the country, selling books in the indigenous languages. Oddly enough, the largest market for this literature was the school system. The institutions for blacks were the main consumer of the Literature Bureau sponsored books as supplementary reading, (Olga, 2009:34).

Primorac (2003) offers an insightful commentary of the vicissitudes and vagaries of the Literature Bureau's editorial and marketing control mechanisms. She inscribes:

The Bureau, founded in the early 1950s, had an ambiguous role: it functioned as a literary agency with an inbuilt, multi-layered censorship mechanism. The Bureau encouraged would-be writers through literary contests and sponsored publication of manuscripts by commercial publishers. Its declared aim was to promote literacy, create a body of work in African languages, and transform Shona and Ndebele into fully-fledged parts of school curricula (schools became the greatest market for Bureau-sponsored books). At the same time however, it controlled the structure and thematic range of such manuscripts in order to discourage Shona and Ndebele texts that were practically unacceptable to the state. The Bureau's editors encouraged narratives constructed around elaborate but schematic plots dealing with love, crime and family intrigue, (Primorac, 2003:53).

Krog's directing hand granted more importance to the Shona novel than the short story. As in Western literary tradition, the Bureau's canonical tradition fashioned the novel as the highest form of canonical representation, with the short story as subsidiary. In its quest for "international allegiance the Bureau endorsed the novel as the latest style of African writing that probes "the problem of words and reality as epistemological enquiry," (Chapman, 2003:385). Despite the short story's appropriateness to majority readership, it has not made any leading reputation. As Chapman avers, the Bureau acquiesced that neither in Shona, IsiNdebele nor English writing does

...one need to separate the value of genre manifestation from the philosophical-cultural problematic; it is inevitable, nevertheless, that the reception accorded the short story and the novel respectively should have mirrored the Western-trained intellectual's exercise over regimes of literary truth, (Chapman, 2003:385).

The canon extolled the novel as the most comprehensive and complex depiction of African livelihood. Chapman (ibid: 385) evinces that the lengthy novel hogs the limelight:

The fact that, according to sales figure, more Africans read short stories than local novels, is beside the point- it is usually a novelist who wins a CNA Award or abroad, a Booker Prize. The short story appears internationally, only under special 'African writers' imprints. Had they not been initially published locally they would probably never have appeared in print.

The thesis of the present study is that whatever advantages the novel enjoys as the premier literary representation the pre-eminence of the short story is a peculiar demand. This

research's contribution to Zimbabwean canon question is, therefore, to negate what appears as to be deliberate deferral reverence of the short story genre.

Chiwome (1994) argues that the publication of the maiden Shona novel, *Feso* (1956) (The Devil Thorn,) published under the tutelage of the Bureau set Zimbabwean literature on a somewhat ambivalent platform from the onset. *Feso*, a subtle historical novel, chronicles the nineteenth century Shona people's history of inversion and oppression by the colonial master. The Bureau celebrated its publication as a story mirroring the primitivism of ancient tribes, oblivious of its subtleties. It was recommended as a school textbook in the Bureau's canon of African education. Ironically, the story incited many readers in a "climate of growing nationalism... as an allegory of the [1960s] political situation," Chapman (2003:158). When it eventually appeared in English translation in 1974, *Feso* was banned and removed from the school's reading list, (canon) for being political, (ibid: 158). The ban was a technical one; the Literature Bureau facilitated its methodical non-availability on the shelves by pushing it out of print. It was out of print for eight years until it was reprinted by Longman Zimbabwe in 1982. The embargo is reflective of the hypersensitivity of the Bureau's censors once they had sensed some political overtones, innuendos or insinuations. It is also symptomatic of the paranoia with which the Bureau treated matters relating to African culture; religion, beliefs and rituals. Thus the Bureau's indifference with the book industry was predicated on their motive to nurture and sustain non-antagonistic Black literature. Certainly, the short story would not be recognized for its folkloric nature.

Reviewing the general nature of the Shona prose literature between 1956 and 1996 epoch in an entry to Steven Serafain's Encyclopaedia of World Literature, "*Zimbabwean Literature in Shona*," Zhuwarara inscribes:

The writing of Shona novels starts in the 1950s with the publication of Solomon Mutsauro's *Feso* (1956) (Devil Thorns) and Patrick Chakaipa's *Karikoga Gumi Remiseve* (1958,) (The Lonely One of the Ten Arrows) and others. ... The novels themselves are a result of blending of elements of Shona legends and folktales with aspects of the western novel. ... Obviously the state-controlled Literature Bureau established in 1954 as well as the influence of missionary teaching affected the nature and orientation of the Shona Novel. It is only after the attainment of independence in 1980 that the Shona novel becomes explicit on the suffering caused by colonial oppression and the Zimbabwean war of independence. ... Since then vibrant creativity has taken place with more novels coming out almost every year. (Zhuwarara, 2001:1-2)

Zhuwarara's posting confirms Krog (1982) who asserts that by 1980, close to ninety novels in Shona and fifty in IsiNdebele had been published under the auspices of SRLB. Yet, neither Shona nor IsiNdebele short story had ever been published by 1980. The Bureau's principles had an overarching effect on the authors' ascend towards their creative potentials.

The SRLB consecrated the art of writing, [print culture,] as the ideal canonical literary representation. Within this divide, the novel was consecrated as the epitome of the print capital. This foreshadows both writers and critics' marginalisation of the short story as a dominated literary entity within the Zimbabwean canonical configuration. The peripheral short story corpus struggles to emerge into a centre historically located in the "literary capitals" of the novel as defined by the SRLB's edifice. Ede (2013:9) argues that the location of the centre permanently elsewhere is a result of "historical colonialism with its socio-political, economic and cultural eroding of the periphery." The Zimbabwean literary canon is very much dependent upon the SRLB's canonical culture's take on the African culture to the extent that the resultant works do not incarnate the diversity of the culture it supposedly represents. Rather than nourishing the growth of a reflective and progressive literature, the Bureau encouraged the development of a pacifist and compliant literature that perpetuated the myth of White Rhodesian 'big brotherhood.' The Bureau's meddlesome involvement in Zimbabwean literature resulted in the underdevelopment of the short story genre. The absence of the genre consummates in what Mapara (2007:27) calls "thin literature ... largely divorced from social and historical reality." Unfortunately, the consumers of this emaciated literature, youthful school alumni, consider the written texts as depositories and repositories of Zimbabwean history and culture. Chapman (2003:156) posits that with Zimbabwean writers aware of the "immaturity of their readers, creative writing became too explicit in plot while themes were simple, even naïve in purpose of edification."

The editors of the Bureau encouraged narratives constructed around elaborate but schematic plots dealing with naïve themes such as "love, crime and family intrigue," (Primorac, 2003:18). Chapman (2003:156) fosters that the novels were "restrictive in the range of vocabulary, concepts and indeed in length." Mapara argues that the Bureau also controlled the length of the manuscripts to suit its established trend. "This was still happening up to the time of its [the Bureau's] disbandment in 1998," (Mapara, 2007:33). Early writers emulated Forster's lecture on the aspects of the novel which emphasises:

So we laid it down as an axiom when we started that human nature is unchangeable, and that it produces in rapid succession prose fictions, which fictions, when they contain 50,000 words or more, are called novels. If we had the power or license to take a wider view, and survey all human and pre-human activity, we might not conclude like this; ... the phrase “the development of the novel” might cease to be a pseudo-scholarly tag or a technical triviality, and become important, because it implied the development of humanity, (Forster, 1970:117-8).

According to Olga (2009:36) “the Bureau successfully propagated a kind of apolitical and socially neutral indigenous ‘folk’ writing which was blithely labelled ‘native.’” The inceptive canon communicated ideals completely alien to its target readership. The African Writers had been apprenticed to writing through Western literary models. In schools they had been introduced to literature through English classics as Shakespeare, Dickens, Wordsworth, Keats, Hardy and others. Indigenous African language writings were reserved as supplementary moralising trivia, hence perfunctory.

The current project negates not only the SRLB ambivalent attitude towards indigenous language literature but also the colonial education’s pyramidal canon as the basis for the repulsion of the short story from the mainstream. The SRLB’s apparent disavowal of indigenous writing is symptomatic of the complexities of the bureaucratic colonial educational policies that restrained and engulfed the whole spectrum of black writing. The propagandist persuasion for the novel at the expense of the short fiction became resident within black writers. The writers apparently produced a ‘reclusive’ black literary canon that Ndlovu (2007:24) considers to be some form of “self-censorship.” As a complex attitudinal phenomenon, self-censorship culminated in black writers’ “avoidance of sensitive issues and direct [dis]engagement with explicitly political issues” (ibid: 24) in indigenous languages writings. As an intricate fear factor, self-censorship also restrained quite a number of prospective writers from attempting to write altogether, thereby satiating the ideological codification of the Bureau that technically countered prospects of any revolutionary art. The overall effect of this kind of self-devaluation cogently yields to distorted and downgraded identity of the short story corpus. This deliberate interventionist filter of the genre sent tremors that foreclosed the ‘educated’ black writer’s consciousness to the extent that he wittingly or unwittingly participated in the production of a conformist canon of ‘educative’ fiction. The devaluation of the short story canon signifies the route through which “every known article of native subjectivity – morality, ethics, cosmology [and] aesthetics” would be subjugated in an “extended drama of identity politics,” (De Kock, 2003:53).

The upshot is that Zimbabwean literary codes for establishing the writer's identity and acceptability were prescribed by the SRLB through the Christian church, the school and/or the printing press. These three; church, school and printing press, became the various realisations of the same education system that defined the canon of Black African writing. Every human practice in everyday life was revalorised through the agency of the Bureau, which had naturally developed into an "inexhaustible pedagogy of persuasion," (ibid: 53).

The present inquiry observes a trend within reviewed literature. Voluminous critical endeavours attacked the colonial education system and the Literature Bureau for producing a lean Zimbabwean literary canon. However, there has not been conscious effort to structurally change the inherited canon. The canon reflects the way in which the Western ideological apparatus was imposed on writers and critics alike. Irele in Olaniyan (2007: 80) contends that the colonial ideological conditioning exerts pressure in such a way that one's perception could not "unshackle the self from the negative determination of their past and its continuity in the contemporary." Since the Bureau played to the gallery, it fashioned an unwavering canon that was enshrined as a technology of control. The canon, therefore, created a medial of convergence in whose versatility both the writer and his creative potential was entrapped. The present study interrogates options to circumvent canonical conditioning.

The imposed western canon has been embraced wholesale by both early African critics and writers who paid homage to the SRLB's edifices. Their sycophantic attitude positioned the writers (and ultimately, critics) to dissociate themselves from the grand task of reviewing and/or establishing an independent canon. They write from outside themselves, a situation that obtains in the dismissal of the conventional short story from the official circuit as unconventional. The dearth of the short story in earlier writings attests to this ideological indeterminacy. This study challenges such canonical indeterminacy by inspiring an intellectual climate that resuscitates the decentred short story genre.

### **2.3.2 Zimbabwean Literary canon as formation**

Ndlovu, (2011) considers the lack of a sound literary critical theory as deterrent factor to the formation of an all-encompassing Zimbabwean literary canon. Ndlovu (2011:24) notes:

There was and still continues to be limited criticism of Zimbabwe's vernacular literature. There have only been a couple of decent efforts in the criticism of Shona literature. Up to date, there is no single book that analyses Ndebele literature. This low level of criticism also explains why vernacular writing is not as robust as it can be in Zimbabwe. Trenchant criticism would engage with writers in a way that challenges them to be innovative and hence improve their writing.

The morbidity of theoretical erudition in Zimbabwean literature manifests in early black critics' desperate embrace of the Western incepted analytical modes. The commissioning of literacy, (writing) as a uniquely prestigious conventional mode of literary representation became identical to recognition and recognition to power. The need for visibility within this 'prestigious canon' fashioned an apologetic and conformist critical neurosis in the academia. The struggle for identity within and authority over the nascent literary canon led to a crisis that Vambe (2005:5) reckons as "poverty of theory." In a desperate bid to fill this theoretical void, those years of theoretical "drought and hunger" (Zimunya 1982) most Zimbabwean critics espoused Westphalian Literary criticism to critique the Zimbabwean novel; (Kahari, 1986, 1990; Veit-Wild, 1992, 1992a, 2006; Primorac, 2003, 2006) Vambe, 2010). Vambe (2010:5) has the contention that the poverty of theory for Zimbabwean literature yields "theoretical approaches that limit rather than expand our appreciation" of its canon. The critics and academia who regarded themselves as self-appointed merchants endowed to paper over the cracks and crevices of the fractured African literary terrain could not "budge from their ideological moorings," (ibid: 5). Vambe adroitly asserts that:

The morbid symptoms of these hardened ideological positions have transferred to literary criticism of the creative arts where the minds of literary critics have also been gripped by ideological inflexibility. This manifests as morbid symptoms similar to the ones expressed in the proverbial fate of the blind man who touched the tusk of an elephant and concluded that this was the whole body of the elephant. (ibid: 5)

Cognisant of Vambe's postulation, the following literature review engages the predominant theoretical positions employed to exegete the Zimbabwean literature by Black writers since independence. The imperative for this engagement is the need to establish the theoretical patterns that justified the subordination of short story writing in narrative discourses. The study maintains that there is danger in retaining pre-existing literary tapestry because critics may not think hard enough to construct new ways of looking at Zimbabwean literary canon that do not simply succumb to extant categories of the European 'Great Tradition.' This study is sceptical of the Poveyan 'Universalist' and integrationist approaches of applying identical rigors of analysis for Zimbabwean canon as one would do with other world literatures,

(Povey, 1965). The study calls for a paradigm shift from integrationist epistemic pastiches, vis-à-vis short stories theorisation.

### **2.3.2.1 Early critics' struggle for canonical identity: Kahari's Realism and the Shona Novel**

The purveyors of Black Zimbabwean literary critical scholarship, (Ngara, 1982; Kahari, 1986, 1990; Veit-Wild, 1992, 1992a) inherited a Western nineteenth century purist viewpoint that 'Literary Criticism' is the only necessary and stable critical organisational entity which required no conscious effort to change. Even decades after the inception of its canon, Veit-Wild (2006) still laments a marked dearth of 'literary criticism' in the grand output of Zimbabwean literature manifest in three languages; ChiShona, IsiNdebele and English. She writes:

Brief preliminary introductions into Zimbabwean literature in English by George Kahari (1980) and Musaemura Zimunya's (1982) were followed by my own work, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1992), which was based on a questionnaire study published as *Survey of Zimbabwean Writers: Education and Literary Careers* (1992). Though limited in its theoretical and analytical scope (see Chennells, "Marxist and Pan-Africanist," as well as Vambe in *Versions*), it set a framework on which the study of Zimbabwean literature relied for a long time. Rino Zhuwarara's *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* and Vambe's small compilation *Orality and Cultural Identities in Zimbabwe* followed in 2001. As regards to Shona literature, Kahari produced a voluminous critical body concentrating on the novel in Shona (four volumes, 1975–90) with categorizations and descriptions of style and plot, whereas Emmanuel Chiwome's *Social History of the Shona Novel* (1996) looked into the factors shaping this literature, (Veit-Wild, 2006:195).

Chitando (2011:29) observes that earlier reviews of Zimbabwean literature in English show a fairly manageable corpus by the time the nation attained independence. "There were many more novels published in Shona and Ndebele than in English when Kahari and Zimunya published their reviews." She adds:

Kahari's work clarifies the contribution of Stanlake Samkange, Solomon Mutswairo, Ndabaningi Sithole and Charles Mungoshi. On the other hand, Zimunya throws light on the publications of Samkange, Geoffrey Ndhlala, Mungoshi, Wilson Katiyo and Marechera. They provided a basis for the criticism of Zimbabwean literature, (ibid: 29).

Kahari's maiden contribution is on record in the development of critical erudition for both indigenous African languages as well as English mediated Zimbabwean literary canon. Zimunya (1982,) Veit-Wild (1992) and Chiwome (1996) tapped from and developed Kahari's theoretical or analytical application of Western realism to Shona literature. Veit-Wild admits that even critics of the contemporary dispensation such as Vambe and Muponde are products of early Europhile critical proponents of Kahari's calibre.

While their [modern critics'] superb analytical expertise can certainly be attributed to the great development of literary theory, they also seem to have recuperated the best out of the combination of post-nationalist and postcolonial/post - structuralist erudition of teachers at the English Department of UZ such as Rino Zhuwarara and Anthony Chennells, (Veit-Wild, 2006:195).

Kahari had also been apprenticed to literary criticism by "Antony Chennells and Bessie Stephenson," "two prominent scholars in the University of Zimbabwe Departments of English and Linguistics, respectively, both of whom he is greatly indebted (Kahari 1986: ix). Kahari taught Shona Literature at the University of Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe for a period of over "twenty years, beginning from 1963," (ibid: 1). A review of his contribution reflects the predominant theoretical view of his day. Significant changes from Kahari's realist theoretical approach came in the socio- historical critical works of Chiwome (1994; 1996 and 1996a) as a precursor to the contemporary wave of Afrocentric scholarship. The on-going review debriefs these contributions towards theoretical shifts within departments of African Languages and Literature across institutions up to date. A selective focus on Kahari and Chiwome as crucial contributors to the structure of Zimbabwean literary canon will help to reflect the problematics of canon formation.

Most notable within Kahari's bibliography are his (1980, 1986 and 1990) publications. His knowledge of Zimbabwean literature, in general, and his analytical approach of the Shona prose genre, in particular, influenced the then University of Rhodesia Department of African Languages and Literature's orientation and outlook towards the literary canon. The curricular and structure of indigenous languages literature instigated by the then Department of African Languages of the pioneer University of Rhodesia influenced the teaching of Zimbabwean literature across Zimbabwean universities and other learning institutions to date.



Acknowledging his overriding contribution to Zimbabwean literary canon-formation, Kahari complements the University of Zimbabwe's constitutive role in the Literature Bureau's drama on Zimbabwean canonical identity. In his 1982 inaugural lecture, he conceitedly asserts:

And the University of Zimbabwe, [cognizant of the fact that literature is a product of human mind and art,] is also connected with these institutions. As a Department of African Languages and Literature, we are properly in the business of explaining and evaluating these, in other words, we translate the concrete into the abstract and vice versa, and this is an important function to assume in a new state. In realizing the form of the Shona novel – the traditional folktale, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, riddles and generally its past as well as its present background – the Department is well equipped to handle these genres as separate issues of the greater form, the novel. There is a team the selection of which was the responsibility of the first incumbent of the Chair and Head of the Department of Languages, George Fortune, to whom I am indebted. He was a man of great scholarship, a man with tremendous vision... in his honour and in conformity with the foundations that he laid in the department, we have changed our name to 'Department of African Languages and Literature' to reflect this. (Kahari, 1982:109)

This so-called 'Inaugural lecture' raises contentious issues of theoretical concern fundamental to the present study. Kahari consolidates the assumption that early collegiate personnel influenced the production and consumption of the canonical texts. His understanding of the academia's "business of explaining and evaluating" the form of canon transcends what Chiwome perceives as the negative role of the Literature Bureau as both censor and agent of cultural annihilation. Instead, he sees the Rhodesian Bureau as having been very receptive and hopes that the newly independent Zimbabwean state supports it. He anticipates government participation to ensure 'bad books' do not reach the public. He suggests that the new government system should empower the publishing houses too to exercise the censor, "then the Literature Bureau will not be blamed for allowing bad novels to be published," (ibid: 109). Thus Kahari considers the novel "the greater form" (ibid: 109) that dispenses with all conventions of the African traditional past. Notable of Kahari's evaluation of the novel is his outright refusal of the validity of African historical and cultural values in the constitution of canonical texts. Apparently, the short story genus gets submerged within the allegedly unorthodox oral traditional mess. As a guide to classification of literature Kahari hints:

Since Plato and Aristotle, the tendency has been to order the total literary domain into three overall classes, called simply literary forms or genre. An attempt will now be made to classify the Shona genres on the basis of form, function, purpose and content, (Kahari, 1997:107).

The Platonic/ Aristotelian concept of genres recognizes prose, poetry and drama typologies as the only distinct literary forms. Notable from Aristotle's dependency on the *Odyssey* and *Oedipus*, Lubbock's exclusive attention to the works of Henry James up to Barthes' reference to Honoré de Balzac, and other Western theorists, a serious deficiency in defining the prose form manifested in their tendency to base their concepts of narrative solely on the novel alone (Forster, 1927).

Kahari subscribes to Western literary thoughts of the nineteenth century European realism. His indebted credulity to George Fortune's scholarship, on one hand and his appraisal of realism, on the other, shaped and nurtured Kahari's critical acumen. Kahari employs "realism... as an English literary and critical term" (Kahari, (1986:125) to discuss aspects of the Shona novel. Realism is technically, a literary tool whose etymology traces to L. E. Duranty's edited journal, '*Realisme*,' (1856) which features Weinberg's article; *French Realism: The Critical Reaction, 1830 – 1870*, (1937). This nineteenth century French artistic movement incited critics and writers to strive for detailed realistic and factual representation of art. It is a theoretical approach that seeks adherence to the imaginative than the idealized in literary focus. Kahari and Ngara, (1982) borrow this realist-cum-Marxist phenomenon to account for realistic preoccupation of the writers' representation of lived human experiences as universal. He favours realism above other critical tools because it "stands opposed to romanticism since the latter idealises heroes, space and time" (Kahari, 1990:255). Thus Kahari denies the centrality of cultural particularism as a mark of Africanness engraved in the "idealise[d] heroes, space and time." He anticipates the Shona novel to reflect the ordinary life by rejecting "all extraordinary – the grotesque, the marvellous, the uncanny and the fantastic – as unrepresentative and untypical in favour of the representative and typical," (ibid: 255). Kahari and his cohorts mistook the Western concept of Universalism to translate that which is "representative and typical." Conversely, the 'typical' African cultural aspects are vilified as "unrepresentative and untypical." This study considers this kind of mismatch to be the fate of short story canonical rejection.

This study builds on the premise that early academia's ideological position disoriented the outlook of the Zimbabwean literary canon. The curricular they implemented resulted in some form of critical indeterminacy and ideological neurosis obtaining from lack of originality and

creative impulse. The existing canon's indeterminacy is symptomatic of the ideological apeman-ship and cultural yes-man-ship the Western book-knowledge imposed on African academia and students. One of Kahari's critical mentors, Edmund Morgan Forster propagates this culture of critical piracy. In one of his 'famous' lectures Forster (1970:83) endorses:

Parody or adaptation have enormous advantages to certain novelists, particularly to those who may have a great deal to say and plenty of literary genius, but who do not see the world in terms of individual men and women—who do not, in other words, take easily to creating characters. How are such men to start writing? An already existing book or literary tradition may inspire them—they may find high up in its cornices a pattern that will serve as a beginning, they may swing about in its rafters and gain strength.

Early Zimbabwean critics took the heed. A plethora of Kahari's literary critical endeavours, for instance, "find high up" within the "cornices" of nineteenth century European literary criticism "a pattern,"[realism] to "serve as a beginning." Kahari's *The Rise of the Shona Novel* (1990) parallels Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe* (1957) His Zambezia, volume X article, 'Realism and the Contemporary Shona Novel' (1982) mimics Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel' (1972:581-91). *Aspects of the Shona Novel* (1986,) a collection of Kahari's lectures, articles and conference papers on the Shona novel, draws its title, structure and inspiration from Forster's, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Forster's book is also a collection of eight lectures on the novel sponsored by Trinity College of the University of Cambridge, delivered in honour of The William George Clark, a fellow of the college.

In the fashion of Forster, Ian Watt, and Raymond Williams, Kahari contends that realism excludes historical, biographical or autobiographic narratives and any event that relates to what exactly happened. He considers these events as being "empirical," (Kahari, 1990:125). His perception of realism is limited to narrative modes that are "the illusions of being specifically related to the real world," (ibid: 125). He expressly refutes the place of history and culture in constructing the canon of Shona literature:

...through art such facts or experience of the real world are made to be of a more generalized application. This generalisation of reality assumes a universality which is immediately governed by two polarized impulses, the aesthetic and the intellectual; that is the desire for formal organisation and the desire for verisimilitude, (ibid: 125-6).

The salient features of Western realism are individualism as opposed to collectivism and universalism as opposed to particularism. Notable within its proponents is the denial of cultural and historical aspects as fantastic, deterministic or prophetic fiction. The appraisal of novel as the highest form of creative narratology celebrates Western aesthetic cum intellectual universalism. Kahari perceives of novel as a “greater form” (Kahari, 1990:109) because it is a product of a “middle class, the intelligentsia or the intellectual affluence,” (Kahari, 1986:100). Thus, intellectual universalism is, for Kahari, indicative of the social consciousness and liberty christened by ‘Great Tradition’ of the English novel. According to Forster, the ‘great novel’ is ahistorical, non-prophetic and non-deterministic. Forster candidly says:

With prophecy in the narrow sense of foretelling the future we have no concern, and we have not much concern with it as an appeal for righteousness. What will interest us today—what we must respond to, for interest now becomes an inappropriate word—is an accent in the novelist’s voice, an accent for which the flutes and saxophones of fantasy may have prepared us. His theme is the universe, or something universal, but he is not necessarily going to “say” anything about the universe; he proposes to sing, and the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction is bound to give us a shock, (Forster, 1970:93).

The novel, as a ‘greater form, for Kahari as for realists in Forster’s calibre therefore:

...is an easy book, as long as we read it as a yarn or an account...interspersed with snatches of poetry. But as soon as we catch the song in it, it grows difficult and immensely important...narrowed and hardened into words, (ibid: 95).

In Forster’s parlance the great novels:

...ask us to share something deeper than their experiences. They convey to us a sensation that is partly physical—the sensation of sinking into a translucent globe and seeing our experience floating far above us on its surface, tiny, remote, yet ours. We have not ceased to be people, we have given nothing up, but “the sea is in the fish and the fish is in the sea.” There we touch the limit of our subject. We are not concerned with the prophet’s message, or rather (since matter and manner cannot be wholly separated) we are concerned with it as little as possible. What matters is the accent of his voice, his song, (ibid: 93).

Within this divide the short story genre does not hold any significance for Kahari as for his mentors. In a manner that belittles the short story genre Forster comments:

...Melville’s *Billy Budd* is a short story, but must be mentioned because of the light it throws on his other work. ... *Billy Budd* is a remote unearthly episode, but it is a song not without words, and should be read both for its own beauty and as an introduction to more difficult works, (Forster, 1970: 100).

Thus Forster perceives the short story as a prelude (prequel) to, and a trying ground for, the prestigious novel. He reproaches it for its remoteness and ‘unearthly’ episodic outlook. It is unbelievably detached and too short to warrant Forster’s attention. Kahari categorically sidelines the short story as insignificant despite the voluminous evidence of its presence in orally mediated art-forms. He reservedly reckons that oral myths contribute immensely on Shona novelistic discourses, “to which we add the not so important and larger collection of folktale and legends which are indeed the forerunner of modern fiction.” A series of his lectures advance his poor relations with the short story discourse. Kahari (1986:100) states:

The new way of writing is realism as opposed to the unusually unrealistic and unconvincing (short) stories of the traditional *sarungano*. ...The modern urban Shona novel has thus abandoned plots which are based on mythology, legends or previously oral literature themes. By so doing, the novel, as well as the poem, has allowed in increasing number of material value of the urban commercial society and thus has inevitably led to the author’s refusal to accept the introduction of the unusual, unlikely and incredible events in favour of the possible and the probable. By thus following this formal realism which in approach embodies their fidelity to the truth, the Shona novelist has found himself aiming at the universal and not the particular.

Apart from Forster’s perception of the short narrative genre as remote and episodic, Kahari dismisses it for being unrealistic, unusual and particular. Thus the traditional folktale (antecedent of the short story,) as a product of its particular African environment, only becomes art because it was a way of looking at the secular, irreligious and earthly. It is perceived as secular art as opposed to canonical literature whose presence indicates the existence of “art for art’s sake” (Kahari, 1986:129) in African epistemic systems. For this reason, Kahari elevates the Shona novel at the expense of the short story in much the same way as the Literature Bureau excluded the genre through the exercise of its censor. Kahari advocates:

...novels act as prescribed texts in schools. Those that are considered indecent and crude will not find their way into the classroom. This has been the practice up to now. Be it as it may, the didactic stories are lessons to the reader not to follow the folly and the stupidity of the characters portrayed, as they convincingly, albeit unrealistically, dramatise the penalty and consequences of evil. (Ibid: 123).

In as much as Kahari’s realist approach to analysing African literature is an avid determination to fill the void of theoretical absence in early scholarship, this study finds it wanting because it is too selective and reductionist. The fundamental question arising out of his theoretical bias has to do with the Africanness of his standpoint; whose culture is laying claim to his scholarship? He appears indifferent to the ambiguities inherent in embracing

Western epistemologies. Yet the contestation between the Western ideological value judgement and African cultural origination is a subject of critical concern within researches of African literature as it is for this study. Central to this present interrogation is the call for a theoretical network that re-contextualizes issues of authenticity and rediscovery of the canonically repressed African artefacts vis-à-vis the short story.

It is the overreaching argument of this study that African literary canon and culture are inseparable. It is through the re-evaluation of culture that the canon is articulated or vice versa. The history of colonial domination as a redemptive historic act gives direction and future to the literary canon of the once dominated people. Culture, on the other hand, is the fountainhead of inspiration and the source for extracting African homogenized conscious enterprise. Construction of African literary canon should restrain from purely simple intellectual scholarship such as its forbearers are guilty of. It should involve active participation and critical engagement with the people's history and culture. The study also holds that the espousal of Western scholarship invites an unremitting bleak version of African literary canon. It perpetuates a vision of pre-colonial African continent devoid of a literature, let alone a canon. Peripheral relegation of pristine traditional modes as archaic images of unsophistication creates miserable imbalance of the canon. This canonical imbalance blurs perception of multivalent cultural artefacts of the Zimbabwe literary terrain, especially in the fields of [short] story-telling, music, theatre, film-making, and journalism, among others. These important performative events are showcased by various institutions such as the National Arts council of Zimbabwe, National Archives of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, universities throughout the country, Zimbabwe International Book Fair, the Harare International Festival of Arts, the International Film Festival, and the Women's Film Festival, where short story-telling is coupled by music and dance among other activities. The recent proliferation of the short story genre is a case for this study to argue for a critical theoretical re-engagement that is culturally oriented. Summarily, the current study challenges Western realism's reductionist disregard for short story autonomy as defeatist and pessimistic. It denies the genre its canonical value and recognition.

### 2.3.2.2 Chiwome's socio- historical construction of Shona novel

The absence of explicit socio-historical evaluation of the African text in Kahari's scholarship prompted Chiwome's shift to an integrationist sociological cum historical approach of Shona literature. Whereas Kahari's voluminous critical corpus concentrated on categorizations and descriptions of style and plot in the Shona novel, Chiwome focuses on factors shaping canon of Zimbabwean literature. Chiwome's socio-historical thinking, informed by his Marxist orientation, makes a crucial paradigm shift in the history of criticism of Zimbabwe's literary canon. It heralded a fertile premise for the implementation of Afrocentric scholarship in Zimbabwean literature, especially within the University of Zimbabwe's Department of African Languages and Literature. His latter works had developed to outright Afrocentricity. Thus, grounded Afrocentric critics such as Zifikile-Mguni (2006,) Muhwati (2006,) Gwekwerere (2009,) and Tembo (2012) developed from Chiwome to probe the artists' commitment to the anti-colonial and anti-neo-colonial struggles within the confinements of Africanness. Central to their invigoration is a quest and search for both the writers' and critics' attitude to, and vision of the nation's future. However, with respect to theorising the short story narrative Chiwome integrates its analysis into that of the novel. Whereas this study is greatly indebted to Chiwome's critical output our point of departure is that there are sufficient reasons to conceptualise the short story as a distinct form from the novel.

Chiwome's most inspiring referential catalogue includes; his unpublished doctoral thesis, *"Factors that Underdeveloped Shona Literature with Particular Reference to Fiction 1950s – 1980s,"* (1994) which was developed to *A social history of the Shona novel* (1996); *A critical history of Shona poetry* (1996); a collection of short stories, *Masango Mavi* (1996); *"Modern Shona Literature as a site of struggle, 1956 – 2000"* (2007); *Zimbabwean Literature in African literature: Crossing Language Boundaries* (2012). Thus Chiwome doubles as writer and critic. His works discuss the different social and historical contexts that conditioned, (and still condition) Zimbabwean literary canon, evoking the Shona cultural and aesthetic sensibilities as essentials of the canon. Chiwome's critical stance, which Fortune (1998) derides as a leftist and deconstructionist form of 'socialist realism,' is, however, a synthesis of the Shona people's social history and culture that frees their canon from the dogmatism of the Literature Bureau's colonial standard of literacy and textuality. Chiwome acknowledges this indebtedness to Memmi (1965), a Tunisian critic's study of the African colonial condition. Memmi analyses African colonial society in terms of a radical antithesis between

the Western colonist, as the exploiter and the colonised, Africa, as the exploited. The West benefited from the relationship of the contact of these extremely polarised systems. Chiwome (1996: viii) draws an analogous interpretation of the Bureau's introduction of education, literacy and writing:

In artistic terms the colonisers urged writers to produce art that would free the colonisers from the blame of exploitation by making the suffering of the colonised appear natural . . . Through writers, the colonialist ideology found its way into the Shona culture.

The colonised adopted borrowed sensibilities which stifled creativity, a position that Muhwati, a student of Chiwome, advances. Having been moved off their "existential spaces and cultural platforms," (Muhwati, 2006:13. web) the colonised disintegrated into pessimism and vulnerability. Their traditional life with its "idyllic and egalitarian experiences" was blighted by this "tragic misalliance with Europe and the West," (ibid; 13). As Chiwome recreates, the colonised African epistemic values were relegated to the periphery where they cease to be active subjects, but objects to be acted upon. African writers, therefore, struggled for artistic expression through an artificial consciousness whose form and content was emblazoned by the SRLB's agency. He furthers that the Literature Bureau became guilty of wilful negligence of the legacy of African traditional art-forms. This controversial beginning for Zimbabwean literary canon created a reversal of operations. Instead of the writers articulating their oral cultural sensibilities, they cherished Western pastiches of tradition. Nwoga (1973:34) satirizes this artistic indeterminacy as:

...a reversal of what might be considered the natural process. Instead of having a base of indigenous tradition into which new elements are introduced, we see our poets starting from the outside tradition and then becoming aware of their own tradition — because they are first literate in a foreign language and their first formal study of poetry is of the foreign language poetry.

Print technology did not only facilitate the conversion of Africans to Christian creed; it also equipped the young African writers with basic literacy and numeracy skills which, ironically, chronicled the 'reverse process' in canonisation of the novel at the expense of the short story. In his article, "*Modern Shona Literature as site of struggle, 1956 - 2000*," Chiwome derides the scornful contradiction inherent in a setup where the writers sought inspiration from the exploiter's hegemony. Referring to the Bureau's machinations he says:



It is therefore a contradiction that the novelistic practice, whose hallmark is innovation through exploration of reality, was to search for truth under the auspices of an intellectually and creatively oppressive propagandistic arm of the government, (Chiwome, 2007:160).

It is Chiwome's contention that the Bureau's conspiracies inversely influenced potential writers to utilize their artistic craftsmanship and African sensibilities to advance its evangelical mission. Thus, Veit-Wild's proverbial "teachers, preachers and non-believers" echo a literary canon that embodied a missionary preached faith of submissiveness and subservience. Although Chiwome (2007:159) perceives the "primacy of African cultural collective values, beliefs and knowledge systems" as functional part of Zimbabwean literature, he does not reflect the position of the short story within this divide. Chiwome maintains that orality consolidates pivotal aspects of African heritage through "exploratory creativity and supports the African family and community life as the fountainhead of Africanness," (ibid: 159). Regarding the relationship between oral and written traditions, Chiwome cites a canonical complexity borne out of the colonially imposed educational system. The colonialist educational system draws its models from Europe rather than the existing African traditions. The African oral traditions, on the other hand, exerted their own influence into modern literature. The output is a complex fusion of the two. This view pervades Chiwome's socio-historical analysis of the "social history of the Shona Novel." He argues that the oral and the written tradition influenced each other for Shona writers. The themes of such writers as in Chakaipa's *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* and Chidyausiku's *Pfungwa DzaSekuru Mafusire*, for instance, are worked out within the imported structures of Christian religious traditions. Chiwome argues that writers like Mungoshi draw their thematic concerns within the struggle between tradition and modernity as epitomized by the clash between rural life and urbanisation in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, for instance.

For Veit Wild and Chiwome, Zimbabwean literary canon is a formation of Black Zimbabwean writing portraying a self-assertive community of writers and critics with the potential for creating new socially, historically and culturally informed identity. As a writer, Chiwome revived the short story production by the publication of *Masango Mavi* (1996.) This publication became the first meaningful effort to negate the trends set by Literature Bureau. The Bureau had set the novel as the greatest representational form of prose narrative. Chiwome and Mguni (2012:297) had noticed with concern that, "Shona and Ndebele

literature conform to the trends set by the Literature Bureau.” The short story collection, *Masango Mavi*, therefore, became an innovative creation of a new literary canon absent for decades in Shona literature. By the turn of the millennium Zimbabwe Writers had embraced short story writing with the desperation of a drowning man. To date the genre threatens to drown the novel. However conspicuously absent from Chiwome’s critical works is the critique of the short narrative. Chiwome and Mguni (2012) consider modern African literature as a “tool over which the elite and the masses fight in order to assert their conflicting ways of looking at life.” They pose another stimulating challenge to the mainstream canonical perception of literature as ‘textuality.’ They posit:

Another cause of literary flaws arises from the conceptualisation of literature as textbook. The Zimbabwean publishing industry is geared towards textbook production. While this makes much business sense, it tends to make publishers and writers government clients, a fact that seems to stifle spontaneous creativity, (ibid: 297).

They challenge prevailing conservative attributes that distinguish the ‘printed text’ as the sole object of literary study. Cognisant of Chiwome and Mguni’s observation, this study maintains that the idea of ‘text’ as ‘canon’ created paradoxical ramifications in Zimbabwean literary canon. The conventions of European canonical culture fashioned perpetual conflict within African literary canon. The appraisal of the novel and the subsequent relegation of the short story from Shona prose narratives echo the rigidity and conservatism of text as canon. The canonical misnomer of appropriating literature exclusively to textuality denied the primacy of orality in narrative structures, despite evidence of its flourishing nourishment in the so-called ‘popular literature.’ However, ‘Popular literature,’ a nomenclature designating Kahari’s ‘art-for-art’s sake’ refused to be eroded to the social base as it floods the marketplaces and major urban social and cultural activities and centres today.

## **2.4 Evolving perspectives on Contemporaneity and Canonicity**

Up to the turn of the century, criticism of Zimbabwean literature has emerged as single authored publications. Kahari and Chiwome’s reviewed critical works feature as single authored volumes. Zhuwarara (2001) offers an informative background to canon of Zimbabwean literature in English. His engagement with Mungoshi, Nyamfukudza, Marechera, Hove, Dangarembga and Vera’s novels consecrate these writers as the purveyors of an official canon of Zimbabwean literature. Zhuwarara (2001:25) concedes:

The writer would be quite satisfied if the critical survey enables general readers of Zimbabwean fiction, especially those who study it at secondary school, college and university levels to interpret the works on the basis of a sound grasp of the texts themselves; these texts have captured the breadth and depth of the Zimbabwean experience and expressed the historical, cultural, social and psychological dimensions of life in the context of a society that is rapidly changing,

Veit-Wild (1992) assumes a sociological approach to contextualise a canon within which authors operate. Her significant interpretation of Zimbabwean literary canon extends beyond her initial preoccupation with Marechera. Veit-Wild (1992a) advances a ‘three generation’ classificatory tier of Zimbabwean canonical novels. Veit-Wild holds that black Zimbabwean authors belong to three basic generations based on social, political and educational backgrounds. According to Gwekwerere (2013) Veit Wild’s threesome generational frame exudes worldview similar to the authors’ respective epochal beliefs and taste because they are products of their respective historical dispensation. Veit-Wild asserts the following in her “generational typology:”

...while the first generation believed in social transformation through education and the acquisition of European values, the second generation is basically a generation of cynics while the third generation is liberal and therefore closer to the second in terms of detachment from the African nationalism, (Veit-Wild, 1992:12 in Gwekwerere, 2013:178).

However, Vambe (2005:92-94) charges that Veit-Wild’s overtly sociological approach fails to appreciate the literary aspects of the works she analyses. In a bid to transcend the ‘generational typology’ Primorac (2006) goes beyond Veit-Wild’s classificatory paradigms to classify black Zimbabwean writers in terms of race and the language of their literary expression. Primorac’s model of race and language of literary expression “superimpose[s] across them, as it were, a set of categories of an entirely different order and origin,” (Primorac, 2006:16). She considers ‘genre and function’ as principal rubrics for categorisation of black Zimbabwean novel. She makes the following submission:

I make use of the manner in which the concept of function – which is not tied to either language or race – can, via the concept of stylistic formation, be used as the basis for literary periodization, and therefore the writing of a literary history which would include texts in several languages...Function...is not something *possessed* by a fictional text and therefore ‘objectively’ deducible from its structure or style. It is, rather, a text’s potential to be used for a specific practical purpose, by a specific set of readers under particular historical circumstances. It may, therefore, be assessed and contested...on the basis of juxtaposing a reading of dominant textual traits with knowledge of the social context and the text’s actual or projected readership, (Primorac, 2006:23).

The genre/function typology views “fictional formations” as developing areas “of social activity, transcending language/race and chronology as the only tools of literary classification,” (ibid: 29). She claims, “In the novelistic landscape of independent Zimbabwe, language and race become less useful as indicators of the kind of novel an author is likely to have written,” (Primorac, 2006:29). Primorac’s emphasis on *genre* and *function* challenges the dichotomies of language and race on which Zimbabwean literature has historically been based. The African language/English language literature as well as novels by authors of different racial backgrounds should be analysed in juxtaposition. Primorac attempts to curtail the limitations “occasioned by the racial and linguistic identities of its authors,” (Gwekwerere 2013:192). Although Primorac’s genre/ function scheme transcends the limitations of Veit-Wild’s generational typology, it does not constitute the place of the short story within this divide.

While acknowledging the above critics’ comprehensive critiques of the leading names in Zimbabwean literary canon, their works do not validate the canonical position of the short story. Their critical acumen is expended on the novel as the highest canonical representative. A critical aversion of the short story corpus is a commonplace trend adopted by their heirs.

Much of the predecessors’ new millennium critical productions emerge in the form of conference papers, journal articles, academic dissertations and theses as well as collections of essay anthologies. These are productions by young students and critics in the mould of Gaidzanwa, Muhwati, Vambe, Chirere and Muponde, to mention a few. They reflect theoretical erudition of their mentors. Those within the African languages and literature tap from Kahari and Chiwome to develop their positions. For instance, Chiwome’s students within the departments of African Languages and literature hail his insightful input. They appraise Chiwome’s works for negotiating the espousal of Asante’s Afrocentric scholarship as a tool to analyse African literary discourses across learning institutions countrywide. On such noticeable partisan, Muhwati (2006:1) commends Chiwome for establishing a link with “oral traditions which function as the vital nourishing supplement to their creative acts.” Muhwati commends Chiwome thus:

Such a creative modality is not only sync with the creative demands of Afrocentrism, a theory that emphasises the placement of African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves Africa, but is also ideologically and pedagogically empowering as it elevates orature to a position where, “it is the incontestable reservoir of the values,

sensibilities, aesthetics, and achievements of traditional African thought and imagination....[while serving] as the ultimate foundation, guidepost and point of departure for a modern liberated African literature” (Muhwati 2006, 1. web).

Muhwati (2006:3) finds Chiwome’s vision innovative and assertive reflecting an “immersion in existence.”

On the other hand, young critics within the English departments accuse Chiwome’s vision of being leftist, social realist, cultural purist and a historical deconstructionist whose approach subjects Zimbabwean literature to a process of ‘deconstruction.’ They cherish literary criticism as the best model for reading Zimbabwean literature in English. According to Veit-Wild (2006:196) these young critics “recuperated the best out of the combination of post-nationalist and post-colonial/post-structuralist erudition of teachers at the English Department of the University of Zimbabwe such as Rino Zhuwarara and Anthony Chennells.” However, none of these youthful critics focus exclusively on the canonical marginalization of the short story. They also extol the virtue of the novel in canonical terms.

Vambe (2001) and (2004) employ the African tradition of oral storytelling as a crucial rudiment of the Zimbabwean literary canon. The fluidity of orality in narrating experiences enables the on-going study to dialogue the condition of the short story since it traces its origins to the story-telling tradition. Chitando (2011:32) comments:

Belonging to a later generation of critics, Maurice T. Vambe (2004) has drawn attention to the role of orature in the development and expression of Zimbabwean literature. His is a valuable addition to literary criticism in the country. Whereas Zhuwarara focused predominantly on later works (except Mungoshi and Marechera), Vambe retraces his steps to include earlier works by Mutswairo and Ndhhlala. At the heart of his thesis is the conviction that the status of African orality has not received due recognition in the analysis of contemporary literature.

Vambe’s argument that the African tradition of oral storytelling is embedded in the modern novel rejects “the binary divisions implied by such terms as ‘high’ culture and ‘low’ culture,” (Vambe, 2004:5). Whilst Vambe’s significant critical progression redirects focus of Zimbabwean literary canon to oral storytelling tradition, an overt absence of the study of short stories is evident. His critical works do not single out the short story as an autonomous genre independent of the conventions of the novel. Vambe integrates the study of the short story with the novel. This integrationist approach has become the norm. Muhwati (2006) elides the distinction between the novel and the short story by devising the phrase, “novelistic

discourses,” to consecrate a synthetic basis for integrating these two forms of Shona fictional narratives. This has become the trend ever since. The current study seeks to transcend the restrictions obtaining from integrating the study of the short story with the novel. Since the short genre received limited attention, it is the thesis of the current project to reclaim its canonical importance.

#### **2.4.1 Contemporary Literature: Expanding Small Literatures’ Canon**

Gaidzanwa (2003:9) argues that contemporary African canon in the literary arena is bedevilled by “barriers that divide the African experience and contribution to the canon” along language, class, gender and medium dichotomies. She observes the dominance of colonial languages of French, English and Portuguese in writings that form the canon, “creating a schism between the people who can contribute to the canon and those who cannot,” (ibid: 9). Gaidzanwa’s works focus exclusively on gender-based assertiveness of African/Zimbabwean literature. She decries the marginalisation of women writing from mainstream canon:

Given the exclusion of poor and female people from the majority of sub-Saharan Africa from formal education, participation in canon formation still remains the privilege of those who can access higher education, are male and can excel in literary and related pursuits. The solitary nature of literary creation demands that participants be people with “rooms of their own” and a certain amount of money to sustain them while writing, (ibid: 9).

Gaidzanwa is particularly averse to “the head-start of men in different areas of African life shaped by western influences such as colonisation” that placed men “at the centre of canon formation,” (ibid: 1). She laments, “While it is relatively easy to name African men who have contributed to the canon and have influenced it significantly according to the standards of western scholarship, it is less easy to do this for African women,” (ibid: 7). She clinches that marginalisation of women writing poses a problem in the creation and transmission of canons in literature. She writes:

On the critical front, the westernised nature of literary celebration and recognition also impinges on critics as people necessarily educated in the same traditions as the literary creators. Peers, scholars and critics, create canons through recognition, mention, analysis, celebration and endorsement of works by literary creators. This

process necessitates partaking in traditions of scholarship that are internationally recognised, predominantly western and not open to participation by the general populace of Africa from whom these writers originate and work, (ibid: 10).

Gaidzanwa's suggestion that the issues of women marginality and colonial over-lordship in African literature can be "partly resolved through translation of the canonical works into local languages," (ibid: 10) conjures Ngugi's (1986) language debate on African literary canon. She derides the noticeable absence of local languages literary works due to the "inability of local African readers to pay market or subsidised prices for literary works," (ibid: 10).

The instrumental approach to literature, partly due to extreme poverty also makes reading a luxury in comparison to food, shelter, clothing and other necessities. Thus, the participation in producing canonical works and their consumption is a profoundly class-bound phenomenon, making innovations in the production of the canon only accessible to western audiences for whom most of the translations are done. Thus, the canonical works tend to be produced by non-poor people, for the consumption of a small class of schooled or school-going peoples as well as westerners who can afford to pay market prices for African literature in translation from English, French or Portuguese. (Ibid: 9, web).

Gaidzanwa (2003:10) also concedes that gender plays a significant impact in structuring the canon in which colonial languages become the "languages of creation, reproduction and participation in contesting, refining and confirming" the African literary canon. The perversion of colonial processes cuts across gender lines resulting in a misalliance of men and women's participation in the processes of canon formation. The end result is marginalisation of female writers. The exclusion of the female voice from the male dominated mainstream canon destabilises efforts to democratise the canon. Gaidzanwa challenges critics and scholars to "re-fashion the canon in literary creation" in a way that women and men "can participate in it at the levels of creation and reproduction as writers, readers and critics," (ibid: 10).

Gaidzanwa's positing of women writings as "small literature" does not, however, evaluate the canonical place of the short story. The inception of Zimbabwe Women Writers' Association in the 1990s as an organ promoting women writing ironically coincides with proliferation of short story writing. It excites the on-going study to investigate if the short story has been marginalised for the same reasons as female writings. Why is the short genre particularly predominant in female authored discourses? Does it justify the claim prevalent in chauvinistic discourses that the short story is a training ground for novel writing? Is the short story also encapsulated in the confines of 'small literature' as female writing?

#### 2.4.2. The Contemporary Zimbabwean Short story canon

The short story has been studied as a prequel or practising ground for the serious business of novel writing. McLaughlin argues that short stories have been “the poor relations of Zimbabwean literature.” The short story is regarded a footnote of the novel; some kind of “a practising ground for the more serious business of writing novels.” This echoes Achebe, (1985) who relegates the genre to the canon of children’s literature. Although McLaughlin could not do any better, his passing comment that crossed his mind when reviewing *Sound of the Snapping Wire*, a collection of short stories, illuminates the thesis of the present research. Mushakavanhu (2007) one of the few featured critics of the short story celebrates the resilience of the local short narrative. As Mushakavanhu comments, short story writers do not depend on writing as vocation for a living. They write only when they get chance, hence, the short story is a convenient medium of fictional expression. The present study, however, goes beyond Mushakavanhu and asserts that story telling is a cultural aspect of the Zimbabwean people. Monetary incentives that Mushakavanhu reinforces are ephemeral. Prizes come and go but the story remains because it is rooted in the people’s tradition. Wherever there is a Zimbabwean, (and by extension an African) there is a story to tell. The study also probes the issue of a ready audience. It questions also whether the genre’s prominence is not an immediacy created by the act of story-telling.

A fresh stimulus for the current study’s preoccupation with short narrative form comes from Emenyonu (2013) who notes that the short story should be treated as a wholesale and independent genre. Emenyonu (2013) edits and reviews an anthology; *Writing Africa in Short Story*, in which he considers the short story genre as worth of “full scale appreciation.” His observation gives impetus to our growing fascination with the genre. We lack such insightful critics in Zimbabwean literary canon whose current pre-occupation has been the Zimbabwean novel. This study re-thinks the Zimbabwean short story in-order to circumvent genre’s unfortunate misrepresentation. As prominent Afrocentric scholars, Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o consent, the traditional concepts about politics, spirituality, myths, legends, oral history, rituals and customs impact new functions for contemporary creative expression. These oral narratives, which have been modified through canonicity, hybridisation and global commodification, feature recurrent sections or epithets that are mnemonics for easier recall. The oral folktale is the preeminent rendition of the contemporary Zimbabwean short story.



The on-going thesis submits that the extended novel, whether in Shona, isiNdebele or English, is a subsidiary of the short story.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The reviewed literature traced the rise of African literary canon to the 1980s African American canon wars. Contributors of the great canon wars, Lauter, Gates and Guillory, among others, submit that literary canons developed with the rise of academies and universities as secular pantheons of literature worth of study. The canons developed as institutional formations or establishments of the best or most representative repositories of their cultural and aesthetic values. Thus, obtaining from the Afro-American canon debate is the notion of canon as an establishment of what is unquestionably great and must be studied as the patrimony of a given literary culture. The review also asserted that canon is never a singular phenomenon. Canon is not just a creation by the academy but also a product of artists and writers' formation. Since canon is a product of several forces it is not only determined by what students read or study in schools and universities, but also by what writers select as legitimate. If a writer is left out because of gender or race, or if an artefact is ignored on the basis of not belonging to a cultural heritage, then that canon is impoverished. In this regard the current study interrogates canon as an impoverishing filter that excludes the short story from the African literary canon. The study quizzes whether this de-centering of the genre from the well-known patterns of the Zimbabwean literary canon is not an outcome of the role of institutions such as Literature Bureau, publishing houses, school and university curricula. The main preoccupation of the present study, therefore, is to validate a new canon for Zimbabwean literature that ruptures disciplinary boundaries between great canon and the small literatures.

A review of the canon question within African literature reveals that canonicity has been subjected to a withering critique by the early African critics such as Achebe, Okigbo, Soyinka, Ngugi, Modisane and Mphahlele who felt to have not been represented within Afro-American canon debates. This sense of voiceless and deprivation of recognition had to be contested by those who felt stereotyped and discriminated. Thus their canon contests grappled with the Africanness of African literature, the language of that literature and much later, the marginalisation of women writing in African literature. The canonical place of the

short story has not been a hot issue of the canon debate. The novel has received all the attention with the short story considered a preserve of amateurs and children's literature. The present study interrogates this noticeable slide.

The reviewed Zimbabwean literature proves that the short story genre documents a case of serious neglect of oral cultures in Africa under the yoke of colonialism. As a cultural and artistic construct whose prime mode of expression is orally based, the short story found itself inconveniently out of the officious circulation of Zimbabwean literary canon. The orthodoxy canon authenticated the production of the novel as the prototype and relegated the short story counterpart to the periphery. The review also showed that the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau nurtured a culture of male dominated writing that sanctified the prevalence of the novel and treated the short genre as the training-field of the more purposeful novel. The school, college and university curricular adopted the apprenticed perception that prose writing is synonymous with novel writing. As the literature review showed it is not until the turn of the millennium that the short story genre resurfaced. The recent proliferation of the short prose form in both written and internet genres demonstrates the existence, regeneration and re-valorisation of the once canonically fragmented "small literatures." Since literary works do not become canonical on their own accord, it is natural that certain literary productions do not enter the canon if they do not conform to the mainstream canonist ideology. This research assumes that canon's existence presupposes the existence of works outside its domain, the so-called "non-canonical works" (Ojaide, 2009) or "small literatures" (Casanova, 2004). The 'non canonical' literature could conveniently be regarded as 'de facto canon' mistakenly perceived not to have attained the level of sophistication where it can be studied seriously by scholars. The current study, therefore, explores the possibility that the short story as an instance of a de facto canon may indicate a natural tendency to thrive irrespective of the official policy. It questions if the short story genre, considered essentially less significant albeit its superstructure, cannot be accorded the same canonical status as the novel.

The key issue, however, is not overemphasising thin identities of the short story and the novel but that of negating the blind acceptance of umbrella theorisation of the two without giving attention to salient features of each of these formations. What warrants attention is: Is it not possible to study the trajectory of the short story genre as form distinct from the novel? How has the genre evaded its canonist onslaught? Is it through assimilating the tradition of the

novel that the short story resuscitated itself? Is it possible to assert that once it gained canonical recognition it mutated to a prototype, uniquely Zimbabwean? The recent proliferation of the genre compels this study to challenge the conventional and conservative perceptions of the novel as the normative reference for all forms of prose imaginative production and experience.

It has also surfaced from the above review that the short story got marginalised for the same reasons as oral traditions were repudiated. As Kahari (1990:363) concedes, “the best novels to come will be those where these traditional features are played down or even neglected.” The short’s alleged episodic, surreal, remote, unusual and secular nature denigrates it to the oral traditional lot that critics such as Kahari discredit. It is dumped as allegedly empirical, fantastic and untypical lot of the messy tradition. The genre is, then, vilified as semblance of ‘art for art’s sake’ whose place within the canon could not be negotiated. The vilification of the genre marked an interregnum of almost forty years, from the publication of the first novel, *Feso* in 1956 to the 1990s, when the genre re-worked its resuscitation commencing with Chiwome’s collection of short stories, *Masango Mavi*.

The proliferation of the short story writing since then has been widespread. Short stories now feature in print, thanks to the Budding Writers Association, (BWA,) Zimbabwe Women Writers, (ZWW,) AmaBook, and Writers International Network, (WIN,) among other book agencies. Thus the genre is evolving to become what Ben Okri, quoted in Mushakavanhu (2007) describes as a perfect form for the age we live in. Okri perceives the short story as a practical and concrete setup that mirrors reality the same way a snapshot captures the reality of an image. A multiplicity of the genre has also been possible due to online publication. The advent of globalisation, trans-migration and new technology through internet and multi-media technologies has created a new cyber community where literary icons, such as short stories, subsist. Yet, the study of literary genres within the confines of the cyber space is a grey area for Zimbabwean literature to-date. No known study worth the mention has been done about Zimbabwean cybernetic literature, particularly referent to the canon of the short story. The present interest in the short narrative stems from realisation of this gap and overriding need to close it up.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*Relevant research output can be said to have been achieved when it could satisfy not only the material needs of the people, but also their intellectual, spiritual, and cultural needs. Research where indigenous African people are significant participants ...primarily meets expectations and quality standards set by indigenous communities. ...It re-affirms the centrality of cultural experience as the place to begin to create a dynamic multicultural approach to research. This is the nucleus of the Afrocentric paradigm, (Mkabela, 2005:184).*

### **3.1. Theoretical Framework: The imperative for an undergirding theory.**

This research is undergirded by Asante's (1992) conceptual assumption that any field of enquiry thrives on theory, set of theories (or lack, thereof) employed to analyse it. Mazrui (2002:3) intonates that theories of African literature, like cultures, form a "system of interrelated values, active enough to condition perception, judgement, communication and behaviour. From a research perspective, Asante and Mazrui contend that theoretical groundedness impacts significantly upon the way research draws to conclusion. As Nobles (1985:103) also attests, a specific theoretical underpinning creates "patterns for interpreting reality," that either broadens or limits the research vision. The theoretical approach that any researcher adopts, therefore, conditions the nature of questions the researcher will ask in much the same way as it influences the conclusions drawn. Subsequently, any given research flourishes or withers consequent of the nature of theory or theories adopted for its creative and critical conception. Theories of literature, therefore, provide researchers with concepts, criteria and critical modalities which regulate the enquiry.

This study is predicated on Ojaide's (2012) normative assumption that African literature is an ideological and cultural construct. The researcher insists that an idyllic theoretical perspective germane to the study of African short story canon should be one that evinces "familiarity with (the culture,) history, language, philosophy, and myths of the people under study," (Mkabela, 2005:180). In Mkabela's parlance, such a conceptual framework should be:

...a way of linking the purpose of research to the very discourse that emerges and is legitimised from within the African framework. Such a position is critical in Africa

(for) researchers (not to) misrepresent indigenous cultural practices and thus continue to perpetuate myths about the indigenous African culture, (ibid: 180).

The research, therefore, quests for an underpinning theory that ideologically traces the emergence of indigenous epistemic systems to African “history, language, philosophy, and myths” (ibid: 180) in the context of European imperialism and expansion. The need for a conceptual framework that institutes a cultural perspective on African data resonating with cultural ramifications is paramount for the current study. The Afrocentric philosophical perspective permeates African cultural corollaries that permit the present inquiry to flourish without condensing research output to simply a collation and production of value-free scientific knowledge.

In view of Asante’s (1987) perception of African people as centred, located, oriented, and grounded, Afrocentricity offers the best alternative philosophical and theoretical perspective that when applied to this research, forms the essential core of its findings. Asante (1980) cited in Mkabela (2005:179) attests:

In terms of research outcomes the issue of cultural location takes precedence over the topic or the data under consideration. The argument is that Africans have been moved off of social, political, philosophical, and economic terms for half a millennium. Consequently it becomes necessary to examine all data from the standpoint of Africans as subjects and human agents rather than as objects in a European frame of reference. Of course, this means that Afrocentricity has implications for indigenous African culture.

Mkabela’s metaphor for “cultural location” in terms of Asante’s constituents of centeredness or de-centeredness is a significant imperative for the conceptualisation of the African short story whose de-centred canonical position is the thesis of the present inquiry. Thus the Afrocentric suggestion of a socio-political and cultural immersion of phenomena of African origination, as opposed to the Western concept of canonical ‘otherness’ of African reality, serves as the best recourse to interrogating the condition of liminality of the African short story genre. In its quest to re-locate (from such a periphery to the centre) the canonically marginalised African oral genres in general, and the short story, in particular, this study adopts the Afrocentric model. As a model for African cultural and intellectual regeneration Afrocentric perspective focuses study of African experiences on Africa as the “cultural centre” and “interprets research data from an African perspective,” (ibid: 180).

However, the propensity for an Afrocentric philosophical perspective is not a blueprint to the fulfilment and resolution, in any absolute sense of Modupe's (2003:70) "victorious consciousness," of the various research-related problematics of African literature. Instead, it re-valorises a revolution and initiates a reconstruction of meaningful directions for the pursuit and actualisation of African cultural epistemologies. It builds towards a purposeful accommodation of complementary theoretical paradigms of contemporaneity. This research project, therefore, complements Afrocentric conceptual engagement with Kaschula's (2004) model of "technauriture." The harmonising technauriture is adopted as a mere interpretive scheme for comprehending the oral, literacy and multimedia interface, within which the contemporary short story can be contextualised. 'Technauriture' is not adopted as an alternative paradigm but simply as a complementary ontological tool for comprehending African literature within the contemporary cybernetic concept.

### **3.1.1. The Afrocentric Philosophical Perspective**

Afrocentricity is an intellectual approach and movement whose etymology traces to the African American scholar, Molefi Kete Asante, the former chair of both the "Temple Circle" of academics, (euphemism for the African American Studies at Temple University,) and the Journal of Black Studies (Kubic, 2010:5). Asante coined the term, "Afrocentricity" in 1988 pursuant of his 1987 "Afrocentric idea." It has, since, been predominantly prolific in philosophical and theoretical voices of African scholarship. Afrocentricity, (Asante's neologistic portmanteau,) derives from his adulteration of 'Africa' and 'centeredness' to negotiate African people as "centred, located, oriented, and grounded" (Modupe, 2003:70). Modupe contends that Afrocentricity is moored in a shared African cultural commitment to negate the European White supremacist fallacy of misrepresenting their Western literary critical matrix as universally indispensable in the analysis of African literature. Its ascendancy, both as a philosophical and theoretical construct that dispels the mythological projection of "Europe as the centre of the world and Africa as marginal," (ibid: 56) promotes and emphasises Asante's idea of Africa's agency, centeredness and situatedness in African literary discourses.

Although Asante's triumvirate publications (1987, 1988 and 1990) phrased, re-phrased and re-emphasised the definition of Afrocentricity in varied ways, its philosophical and theoretical thrust is, nevertheless, always in conformance. Kubic (2003:5) observes that even Asante's most recent publications, emerging almost four decades after the Afrocentric formulation phase, are consistent in their propagation of Afrocentricity as a theory of agency that celebrates African people "as agents rather than spectators to historical revolution and change." A scintillating premise for the application of Afrocentricity to the scope of this study derives from Asante's definition:

Afrocentricity is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person. In education, this means that teachers provide the students the opportunity to study the world and its history from an African world view...By seeing themselves as the subject rather than the objects of education - be the discipline biology, medicine, literature, or social studies - African ... students come to see themselves not merely as seekers of knowledge but as participants in it, (Asante, 1990:171).

The present study's crystallisation of the Afrocentric philosophical perspective is coterminous with Asante's placement of African cultural and historical experiences as the central axis from which Africa epistemological constructs can be negotiated. In order to appreciate the value and place of the African short story within the African literary canon this research considers African people's cultural belief patterns and practices of story-telling as the "frame of reference" from which the genre can be placed at "the centre of analysis and synthesis" (Asante, 1988:39). Marquita (2012:151) argues that Afrocentricity centres on prioritisation of African people's "customs, beliefs, motifs, values, and conceptualisations (which) is the rubric by which the application of an Afrocentric perspective operates." Such an installation achieves what Modupe (2003:58-59) celebrates as the "African collective cognitive will to cultural and psychic liberation" whose ultimate goal is "Africana existence on Africana terms." The study has adopted Afrocentricity, therefore, as the most valid and reliable philosophical perspective and theoretical tool to liberate the Zimbabwean short story from the canonical marginalisation cultured by the canonising institutions such as school, colleges, universities and the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau's Westphalian literary tradition.

Suffice to state from the onset that this research does not seek an appraisal of the whole gamut of the historic rise and development of the Afrocentric theory and movement. A host of Afrocentrists have already expended their energies on that imperative endeavour, especially during the 1990s when the euphoria for Afrocentric scholarship was at its peak: (Amuta, 1989; Ani, 1994; Asante, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1999; Gray, 2001; Howe, 1998; Karenga, 1993; Kwame- Agyei, 1992; Mazama, 2003; Miller, 1996 and Modupe, 2003). Furthermore, the research is not pre-occupied with questions about the veracity, adoptability and limitations of the Afrocentric paradigm in African analytical discourses either. Once more, a plethora of literary productions abounds: (Appiah, 1996; Gilroy, 1993; Makrinus and Berdien, 2009; Marable, 1995; Marquita, 2012; 2009; Matthew, 1997; Mkabela, 2005; Ogbur 2004, Schlesinger 1998, West 1999). Conscious of the limitations of and accusations levelled against Afrocentric scholarship, this research focuses on what Afrocentricity is, rather than what it is not. Ideally, this study is an Afrocentric engagement with the African short story as an African cultural phenomenon, hence it adopts this philosophical cum theoretical perspective as “praxis” (Modupe, 2003:61).

In his critical exigency of Afrocentricity, both as a philosophical perspective and theoretical framework, Modupe sums that this engagement be viewed as “Afrocentric praxis.” Modupe (2003:61) defines ‘praxis’ as an “Afrocentric engagement” with phenomena inclusive of all that make Afrocentric conceptualisations engagement possible: “an academic discipline, a paradigm, a philosophical undergirding, a theoretical framework, framework dynamics and methodologies of engagement,”. His idea of ‘Afrocentric engagement’ as ‘praxis’ crops out of Asante’s assertion that:

Afrocentric scholarship is itself praxis. Afrocentricity as paradigm has propaedeutic values because a myriad of assumptions and basic propositions employed by Africa American studies can be examined. Such scholarship as praxis reduces the tendency for individuals to make random non-connected comments, even though those comments might be informative. The logic of procedure provides groundwork for others to follow; this is the value of Afrocentric scholarship as work. (Asante, 1987:175)

For “the logic of procedure” (ibid: 175) the current study seeks an explicit “Afrocentric engagement” with the Africa short story, in general, and the Zimbabwean one, in particular, in order to negotiate its problematic canonical condition. This short story’s condition of liminality corresponds to Modupe’s “condition complex” assertion, (op. cit: 62). This study,



therefore, seeks to interrogate the ‘condition complex’ of the short story with the empirical goal of reconstructing, reclaiming and revitalizing this canonically marginalised genre. The reconstruction, reclamation and revitalisation form the core of this study’s output, what Modupe perceives as “victorious consciousness” (Ibid: 70). Thus victorious consciousness is, for this project, the intellectual bliss that comes with the sense of having achieved the knowledge and understanding that the Zimbabwean short story is the primary discourse force of African prose genres. The propensity for this vision ensues from the need not only to negate but to regulate the Westphalian defined African literary canon’s lost desire for reflecting African sensibilities in literature. The study rebuts the canonical conservatism evident in collegiate and other canonising institutions’ self-willed “anti-agency” or “dysfunctional behaviour” (Ibid: 64) towards the short story genus. Asante (1988) affirms that Afrocentricity as a philosophical cum theoretical paradigm destroys the unfortunate prospects of compliance with the European ideas about concepts germane to Africans by emphasising Africa’s subject-hood in the projection of its realities.

To achieve this feat the study espouses the seven fundamental criteria that Mazama (2003:27) emphasises for an easy application of the Afrocentric praxis, namely:

1. The African experience must guide and inform all inquiry;
2. The spiritual is important and must be given its due place;
3. Immersion in the subject is necessary;
4. Wholism is a must;
5. Intuition is a valid source of information;
6. Not everything that matters is measurable; and
7. Knowledge generated must be liberating,

As Marquita (2012:151) avers, these criteria form a collaborative sync with “Africana people’s historical and cultural lives.” Citing Banks (1992), Marquita suggests that Afrocentricity is a function of an absolute (not of comparative) analysis of African literature. As a matter of fact, Marquita (2012:151) posits:

These criteria therefore institute a standardised foundation for scholarship produced on people of African descent. The establishment of a minimum standardised research criteria fosters a disciplinary stance whereby researchers are charged with the task of implementing these criteria in their research on Africana phenomena.

Accordingly, these criteria nurture a pre-eminent recourse to investigating the short story whose condition of marginality is embedded in the institutional cultures that canonise. In this sense, the Afrocentric philosophical perspective not only generates new ‘orientation’ toward interpreting the short story genre but ultimately inspire innovative visions of an African literary canon in typological studies. The key here is ‘epistemological centeredness,’ which involves placing “Africans as self-willed agents instead of objects of investigations” (Mazama, 2003:5).

The main reason for embracing Afrocentricity as a philosophical perspective and theoretical framework lies in the present researcher’s easy identification with the model’s tenets as enlisted in Asante (1999). For Asante (1999:5-6) Afrocentric scholarship espouses:

1. An intense interest in psychological location as determined by symbols, motifs, rituals, and signs;
2. A commitment to finding the subject-place of Africans in any social, political, economic, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender, and class;
3. A defence of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, and literature and a defence of a pan-African cultural connection based on broad responses to conditions, environments, and situations over time;
4. A celebration of ‘centeredness’ and agency and a commitment to lexical refinement that eliminate[s] pejoratives, including sexual and gender pejoratives, about Africans or other people;
5. A powerful imperative from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people as one in constant and consistent search for liberation and *Maat* [truth].

These tenets foreground the Afrocentric value for “ideas, language, knowledge, rhetoric, and ‘truth’” of African historical and cultural origination that fashions “new ways of thinking new concepts of the possible and natural and new definitions of the impossible and deviant,” (Kubic, 2010:10). A meaningful pursuit of these Afrocentric imperatives requires the researcher to be meticulous with language concepts and terminology employed to describe African-descended peoples and cultures. Kubic (2010:11) emphasises:

...words carry power and often subconsciously dictate the terms of debate; even without elaboration, use of two words that are technically synonymous might in the

first instance provoke thoughts of superiority and in the second instance ones of inferiority. Or the decision to use one word instead of another might result in the activation and application of entirely different discourses. Afrocentrists are unambiguous in stating that language and terms used for African-descended peoples are not merely inadequate, but oppressive.

A commitment to “lexical refinement” (Asante, 1999:5) forms the core of the on-going inquiry. This study propagates the idea that the use of particular “words, imagery, and rhetorical strategies as clear indicators of ideological orientation, cultural affinity, and interest articulation” (Kubic, 2010:11) eradicates pejoratives about African literary canon. A synopsis of Kubic’s idea reveals that Afrocentric scholars actively engage in restructuring the language that tells the ‘truth’ of African peoples. Kubic’s proposition resonates with Asante’s consideration of “lexical refinement” as the basis of erecting “the pyramids of progressive national liberation” that frees Africa from the “imprisonment imposed on people by the rhetorical condition itself” (Asante, 1988:37). Thus, Afrocentric scholarship endorses the creation of African terms and concepts as a strategy for fashioning alternative discursive frameworks. Kubic (2012:11) augments:

Given the blithering ignorance that most of the denizens of Eurocentric countries and cultures have of Africa and African languages, (sic) the introduction of these new terms allows Afrocentrists themselves to give the words meaning.

Asante (1990) argues that it is rare to read Afrocentric literature that does not express the need for people of African descent to create entirely fresh academic disciplines and theories on established facts. He argues that fresh epistemological bases and set of practices are needed to challenge the existing Westphalian ones which are irredeemably racist and particularistic. For this reason this study coins the term ‘*Africulture*’ to determine a philosophical bridge for comprehending African phenomena and qualities of thought and practice that define the Africanness of their culture. The upcoming espousal contextualises ‘Africulture’ within the precincts of Afrocentricity.

### **3.1.1.1. Africulture as designation of Afrocentric scholarship**

Etymologically, the neologistic blended Africulture derives from the researcher’s lexical adulteration of ‘Africa’ and ‘culture’ to designate phenomena typically African in cultural terms. The idea is in sync with Karenga (1993, in Gray, 2001:46) who defines Afrocentricity

as “a quality of thought and practice rooted in the cultural image and human interests of African people.” Thus, all black people, continental or diasporic, extol a cultural affinity that owes credence to a “presumed fundamental ‘Africanity’ of these black cultures” (Kubic, 2010:11). Such “a quality of thought and practice” expressive of Africanity, Africanness or African cultural affinity is what this study terms Africulture. The concept of Africulture navigates a platform for this research to name, define and describe African cultural values, ideas, concepts and practices “which supposedly have no corollary in English (or other European) vocabularies,” (ibid: 12). Since European cultural values and belief systems are antithetical to their African counterpart, the ultimate “liberation of our thought from its colonised condition will require the creation of a new language” (Ani, 1994:10). The idea of Africulture germinated for the convenience of transforming African thought processes about African/ Zimbabwean short story genre from the conservative perception fashioned by the canonical rubric. The practice of story-telling is a cultural practice, a way and “a philosophy of life” (p’ Bitek, 1986:12) of the Zimbabwean people, and by extension, of all black people, both continental and diasporic. It is the African people’s culture, their custom, hence *Africultural*. This ‘Africultural’ suggestion underscores that the practice of story-telling exudes an “African worldview” (Ibid: 12) which, for this study, is the starting point, the frame of reference or central axis for reconfiguration of African short story. In confluence with mainstream Afrocentric scholarship the present idea of Africulture:

...spring[s] up organically from the African experience and reflect the particularistic value and knowledge systems of African cultures, in the same way that Aristotelian logic and European science ...are thought to be particularistic expressions of European culture. Credence is lent to Afrocentric arguments, at least for some, by a sense that past scholarship conducted or influenced by white and Eurocentric thought has failed to grasp fundamental aspects of non-European experiences. Today, the most obviously racist (or sexist or classist and on and on) of these works are accused of poor methodology, supremacist ideological blindness, or rank charlatanism (Kubic, 2012:13).

The real emphasis on Africulture as a model augmenting Afrocentric scholarship lies in the researcher’s recognition of the subject-hood and agency of African culture in oral performative discourses to which short story (telling) is an alienable part.

The appropriation of the African cultural space (Africulture) as a site of contestation between canonising culture and the marginalised short story cult excites further theoretical explorations. What is culture and how does it affect canon-formation? People may instinctively discern what culture is and where they belong within its paradigm, but it cannot

be defined with ease. Yet it is imperative to define culture at this juncture, particularly because of the need to vie for 'Africulture' as a theoretical construct and intellectually acceptable conceptual and interpretive prism upon which Zimbabwean literary canon can be validated.

[www.tamu.edu/faculty/.../culture.html](http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/.../culture.html) accessed on 18 December 2014, recollects numerous definition of culture. For a convenient epistemological repositioning of the research question, only three definitions adjudged to be all-encompassing are retained. Culture is:

cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, notions of time roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in a course of generations through individual and group striving.

The second definition reconstructs culture as:

...way of life of a group of people, the behaviour, beliefs, values and symbols that they accept generally without thinking about them that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to another.

The third and essentially informative definition regards culture as constitutive of:

...patterns explicit and implicit of and for behaviour, acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups including their embodiments of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; cultural systems may be considered as products of actions, (Web, accessed 18/ 12/ 2014).

The above citations emphasise cultural uniqueness and diversity within groups of people. The motifs of cultural relativity and particularism cannot be undervalued. The study makes a conscious effort to reflect the idiosyncratic traits that distinguish the institutionalised 'canonising culture' from the authentic culture of the African peoples, hereby code named 'Africulture.' The thesis of the on-going autopsy is to reconfigure the canon of the short story out of the particularistic expression of the Great European literary tradition that militates against a collectivist African literary canon. It is within this context that Africulture becomes paramount.

Africulture proves the institution of canon, (canonising culture) to be domineering, bureaucratic and hence particularistic. Africulture conceptualises culture in terms of its homogeneity in spite of its diversity. African culture is collective, all-encompassing, and therefore, unifying. Thus, the advocacy for 'Africulture' as an analytical model, acknowledges the uniqueness of unity in diversity of cultures and cultural artefacts of African

people. Despite its variations, the nature, act or practice of an African short story[ing] retains “a matrix of values, ideas, beliefs, and outlooks which are more or less constant across time and place” (Kubic, 2012:7). There is a fundamental level of cultural harmony in story-telling across Africa to which Asante (1988 in Modupe, 2003:59) appropriates the term “cultural unity.” Modupe, (2003: 59) regards it as cultural reclamation.

The espousal of Africulture, within the confines of the Afrocentric paradigm is embedded in the overriding imperative to find the subject-place of the African short story. Africulture, therefore, celebrates centeredness and agency of African cultural epistemologies. It is also a “commitment to lexical refinement” and a powerful imperative to “revise the collective texts of African peoples as in constant and consistent search for liberation and Maat, (truth,)” (Asante, 1999:6). It situates research from an African cultural viewpoint in order to create Africa’s own intellectual perspective. To borrow from Mkabela (2005:180) Africulture focuses on Africa as the “cultural centre for the study of African experiences and interprets research data from an African perspective.”

The study adopts Africulture as a mere concept of Afrocentric conjectural standpoint that complements to explicate the dialectics of short story canon. It is not developed as a distinct paradigm of its own but as a concept within Afrocentricity that constitutes a novel [re]orientation towards the recovery of African place, cultural configuration and celebration of African centeredness and urgency in eradicating pejoratives about African worldview (Asante, 1999:5). As the study argues, this is a powerful imperative for re-thinking, rewriting and reconstructing African epistemologies as determined by “cultural symbols, motifs, rituals,” (ibid: 6).

The idea of Africulture is a powerful tool to revisit the collective texts of African people and a celebration of African resilience and commitment to cultural refinement that eliminates African negativity in scholarship, (ibid: 6). Africulture corresponds to what Adesina (2008:31) considers “endogeneity,” which contextualises “an intellectual standpoint derived from a rootedness in the African conditions, centering of African ontological discourses and experiences as the basis of one’s intellectual work.” This study holds as particularly crucial

the epistemologies that centre “African ontological discourses and experiences” as the basis of any serious intellectual work.

The application of the Afrocentric philosophical perspective, (with Africulture as its attendant,) to the study of the contemporary short story may, however, not sufficiently account for the proliferation and metamorphosis of the genre within the current literary terrain of the ever-changing multi-media global trends. Reflecting the multi-cultural realities of South African literature Mkabela (2005:180) notes that Afrocentric paradigm serves “as a liberating intellectual movement” that builds towards “a pluriversal perspectives in research.” The contemporary context of multi-culturalism, trans-migration, the internet and globalisation charts a new cyber community of African literature that calls for theoretical pluralism in which Afrocentric philosophical views should fuse with other perspectives without hierarchy. The proliferation of the contemporary short story through the computer mediated multi-media and the internet, (the cyber space) means that the Afrocentric philosophical perspective should open new insights and dimensions to comprehend African indigenous culture within this context of the cyber community and multiculturalism. Kaschula (2004) coined the term, ‘technauriture’ as an alternative paradigm to understanding the “oral, literacy and multi-media interface” in literature. This study, therefore, exploits Kaschula’s technauriture as a paradigm to investigate the slide into cyber literature.

Kaschula and the proponents of ‘technauriture’ do not popularise it as a model complementing Afrocentricity. Neither did they resort to Afrocentric scholarship in any of their endeavours. Attempting to bond Afrocentricity and technauriture may be conflictual. The on-going study’s attempt to merge these two models is tantamount to skirting on thin ice as the bonds may not be firm. Although Afrocentric scholarship may be collaborative, conflict is expected in the process of merging it with technauriture, since the two come from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, in anticipation of the conflict, the study co-opts some dispute resolution mechanisms to equitably curtail the problem of infusion. The up-coming exposition of ‘technauriture’ sets the premise for a logical engagement that bargains for equity of these two research initiatives.

### 3.1.2. Technauriture as paradigm of Contemporaneity

Kaschula (2004) coined the term, ‘technauriture’ as an alternative analytical recourse for comprehending the intersection of orality, the written word and digital technology. Kaschula and Mostert (2011:3) explain its etymology:

Regarding its etymology, the ‘techn’ represents technology; the ‘auri’ derives from the word ‘auriture,’ and the ‘ture’ represents literature. Auriture alone, as used by Coplan (1994:9), implies the use of a range of senses in one’s appreciation of the oral word: hearing, speaking and the more abstract aesthetic analysis of a word. Auriture has been suggested in place of orature, orality or oraural, the latter a rather clumsy term introduced by Kishani (2001:27). Technauriture attempts to embrace the dichotomies acknowledged by Ong and Finnegan, and to firmly place the debate regarding orality and oral traditions in a 21st-century discourse that implicates contemporary modes of technology.

Kaschula and Mostert consider Ong and Finnegan’s critical engagement with the orality/literacy dichotomy as the backdrop against which ‘technauriture’ is predicated. As they argue, the “pre-internet” Ong (1982) expresses great reservations with the use of the term ‘oral literature’ as referent to oral traditions and performative genres, (ibid: 3). While Ong (1982:9) acknowledges that human beings “in primary oral cultures ...learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom,” he insisted that they do not study “oral tradition or a heritage of oral performance, genres and styles as “oral literature” (Ong 1982:12).

Against Ong’s background, Finnegan is “emphatic in her recognition of the role of oral poetry and, by extension, orality, and its innate value to human society” (Kaschula and Mostert, 2011:3). Finnegan (1977:2, in Kaschula and Mostert, 2011:3) claim that:

It is difficult to argue that they [oral poets] should be ignored as aberrant or unusual in human society, or in principle outside the normal field of established scholarly research. In practice there is everything to be gained by bringing the study of oral poetry into the mainstream of work on literature and sociology.

Henceforth, Finnegan popularised the term ‘orature,’ (a 1970s Zirimu’s coinage,) in her attempt to mediate between ‘oral’ and ‘written’ literatures, and “to address the fissure highlighted in the debates in terms of the contradiction associated with the term ‘oral literature’” (Kaschula and Mostert, 2011:3). They further assert:



At the time that the term 'orature' was coined, Finnegan had recognised the innate artistic qualities of oral performances and aspired to 'upgrade' oral genres by using the term literature (oral genres as art and not only as lore). On the other hand, focusing on the consequences of viewing orality and literacy as different technologies, and emphasising the dichotomy, Ong saw the development from orality to literacy as inevitable (1982:175). Today, orality or 'orature', literacy and technology coexist, and while many societies wish to embrace literacy, this does not mean that 'orature' is necessarily rejected. The term 'orature', and the resolution it brings to earlier dichotomies, may then be seen as a precursor to 'technauriture.' (Ibid: 3).

The concept of technauriture, inclusive of "all existing and foreseeable aspects of the evolving nature of orality and its written counterparts," (ibid: 3) places orality on an equal footing with the application of technology,

The impetus for technauriture as a theoretical construct gained momentum following the 9th Conference of International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa, (ISOLA) held at the University of Venda in South Africa from June 28 to July 1, 2012. Merolla's (2014:85) article reviews the conference output as an efficacious re-engagement with "orality, new-media, and the Postcolonial experience" that reflects the changing oral genres and their conceptual reframing within the context of global digital technology. Merolla holds that the conference's themes revolved around the interplay between the age old "African paradoxes" engulfing the orality/literacy dichotomy and "the new focus on the interconnectedness of ... African verbal genres and modalities of production" (ibid: 82) leading to divergent interpretations. Thus the controversy of 'eroded orality' in the face of 'literacy' become more confounded in view of the "innovative oramedia trends - of innovation in African oral genres and oral communication through literacy and new media," (ibid: 82). Consequently, scholarly interest is increasingly shifting attention to the "changes in style and content of songs and narratives ... production due to the introduction of literacy, radio and television," (ibid: 82). Within the oral/literacy continuum, technauriture evolved as a nascent critical re-engagement with new forms of orality in writing, the multi-media and the internet. It has, thus, become a quest for rediscovering 'eroded orality' or cultural loss linked to the diffusion of technologies.

We can note that in the 'eroded orality' trend, African oral cultural heritage - now a model for artistic creation and social functioning - replaces the 'positive' and 'critical' faculties of literacy (Merolla, 2014:84).

It is within this dawning intellectualism that Kaschula (2004) and latter in partnership with Mostert (2009; 2011) designated the concept of technauriture to investigate the digitalisation,

commercialisation and technologisation of African literature in their study of Xhosa oral poetry. Since then adherents of “technauriture” have adopted it as an approach which:

...integrates technology, auriture (the aural aspects of producing and receiving oral literature), and literature. Technauriture is proposed as a paradigm for engaging with the interplay of orality, the written word, and technology, and its contextualization “within a post-modern milieu that has ... historically undervalued the spoken word,” as well as for maintaining the central role of orality in discourses on technological media (Kaschula and Mostert 5). Another positive aspect is that “technauriture” - as term and paradigm - offers the opportunity to bridge the arguments pivoting on loss and innovation in previous debates, (Merolla, 2014:85)

The proliferation of online short stories, poems, songs and other oral narrative productions within the contemporary dispensation of the “innovative oramedia trend,” (Ibid: 83) is on record. The short story writers publish both in print and online. Technauriture, therefore, appropriates a common ground for the study of cybernetic literary publications on the same slide as their printed counterpart. Thus Zimbabwean short stories anthologised in print, (such as Chirere (2007), Chihota and Muponde (2000), Zimbabwe Women Writers’ publications and AmaBook’s collection of short stories, can be analysed in juxtaposition with online short stories or internet publications using this model.

Mostert (2010:12) considers technauriture as a referential paradigm necessary for interrogating the “pressing issues surrounding indigenous knowledge systems and orality.” He perceives the cumulative knowledge and experience of human societies as continually embodied in orality. In spite of whatever inroads modern technology might have made, Mostert places great store of value on the oral tradition as a vehicle of social cohesion.

What technauriture allows is the creation of a coherent paradigm for researchers to assess the potential for harnessing technology to reverse the demise of oral traditions and the knowledge systems embodied in such traditional contexts. Effectively to offer a home for orality and oral traditions within the complex technological environment that is becoming characteristic of all modern human societies, (ibid: 12).

Thus technauriture’s great store of value on orality represents the kernel of the dialectic that the present research seeks to capture by studying the short story. Chinyowa (2001:13) advances the argument that the undying oral presence is consolidated around the migration of the medium of transmission into a digital environment, “in a manner that does not result in similar loss of essence as that which has been associated with the limitations of reducing orally based systems to written form.”

Technauriture permits the on-going to examine the potential impact of the technology on the oral artefacts such as the short story. Following Kaschula and Mostert's application of the theoretical model to Xhosa poetry the present research quizzes whether or not oral performance are fundamentally altered in their re-production through technology. Along with Mostert, the current research catalogues a series of questions:

How does audience participation inform the performance? How does the knowledge manifest orally and *in situ* migrate to other contexts? These open up further questions regarding the social construction of reality: "Media processes are part of the material world, yet we must also capture the force of the mystifications that media generate or, less pejoratively, their contribution to the social construction of reality," (Mostert, 2010:13).

The application of technauriture as an analytical paradigm requires an analysis of the migration of contexts from the primordial oral through the written medium to the current electronic or multi-media form. The essence is to determine whether the medium of delivery does not become an end in itself or a means to an end. As Kaschula and Mostert (2011) clinch, new technological developments present all practitioners with an opportunity to reverse the alienation the written word has caused to many oral cultures. However, Mostert (2010:15) warns that in order to reverse this alienation, "it is incumbent on the researchers to engage in a rigorous exploration of what knowledge is, how knowledge is valued, and how it can be mobilised effectively."

This study, therefore, espouses technauriture as a theoretical model that bridges the gap for negotiating written and cybernetic literatures. The choice for the short story genre amplifies a case of canonically neglected oral genres whose resilience lies in their mutation within the cyber space. While the medium of transmission has changed, from the primordial oral discourse passing through the written phase to the ultimate electronic multimedia form, the short story form remained intact. Thus technauriture draws the analysis of the short story genre to the same conclusion as Afrocentric scholarship that genres of African cultural origination do not change. Both analytical models trace oral performative discourses to the African cultural roots, to the centre or the *axis mundi*. Despite their deviations and/or eccentricities, Afrocentricity and technauriture complement each other to draw this exegesis to a conclusion that the short story is a stand-alone genre independent of the conventions of the novel.

### 3.2. Research Methodology: A Qualitative inquiry

The methodological approach pliant for the on-going research is qualitative research technique. As defined by Punch (2003) and furthered by Jupp (2006,) the qualitative research method is an empirical approach that investigates social phenomena that are not quantifiable. It does not rely on statistical numeration amenable to quantitative measurements. As Jupp (ibid: 249) contends:

Qualitative research is often based upon interpretivism, constructivism and inductivism. It is concerned to expose the subjective meaning through which people interpret the world, the different ways in which reality is constructed in particular contexts.

Cognisant of Jupp's realisation of the above, this research adopts the qualitative approach to interrogate the short story genre whose reality is constructed through language, images and cultural artefacts. The recourse to qualitative method subsists in the researcher's realisation that the research question, (the dialectics of short story canon within African literary canon,) requires an interpretive autopsy. The researcher also gains insight from Punch's (2003) disambiguation of the term, qualitative, as an interpretive approach that investigates social phenomena not feasibly quantifiable. Punch argues that qualitative research searches for the values of in-depth holistic meaning over quantity.

The current research seeks a profound understanding of the short story problem as a situated activity bedevilled by the pluralisation of the canonical worlds. The central concern of this enquiry is to determine the legitimacy of the genre in the world of canons where other criteria for *genresisation* exist. In this exploration the research does not involve any numeration; rather, it relies on textual data. Qualitative research's underpinning epistemological assumption, therefore, helps the researcher to interrogate the meaning and experiences expressed by the "textual data" (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2011:16) to generate meaningful knowledge about short stories.

Although Hennink, et al, (2011) perceive a singular definition of qualitative research to be peculiarly elusive due to the broadness of the range of techniques and philosophies covered, Braun and Clarke's most basic definition can be adopted for this research project. Braun and

Clarke (2013:3) define qualitative research as an assumption and interpretive approach that “uses words as data collected and analysed in all sorts of ways.” Hennink, et al, (2011:16) consider ‘words’ as “textual data” collected systematically through “in-depth interviews, observations” or group discussions and then interpretively analysed to “develop an initial understanding, to identify and explain behaviour, beliefs and actions.” To study the problem of the short story canon the current researcher adopts this approach of collecting data through interviews, questionnaires and group discussions then analysing the textual data to determine and establish patterns that fashion the analytical schema.

The vitality of this approach reposes in the reflection of Frankel and Devers (2000:251) that “rigour in qualitative research is associated with openness, scrupulous adherence to a philosophical perspective, thoroughness in collecting data, and consideration of all data in the development of a theory.” Unlike quantitative research where “rigour is reflected in narrowness, conciseness and objectivity and leads to rigid adherence to research designs and statistical analyses,” (ibid: 251) qualitative research presents researchers with new social contexts and perspectives. Flick (2014) makes explicit Frankel and Devers’ above remarks. Flick (2014:11) avers that due to the development of “the pluralisation of life worlds,” qualitative research gains prominence in the study of social relations. He considers “pluralisation of life worlds” to mean the “growing individualisation of ways of living and biographical patterns... and the dissolution of old social inequalities into a new diversity of milieus, subcultures, lifestyles and ways of living,” (Ibid: 12). The rapid social changes and the resultant diversification of “life worlds” (in Flick’s parlance) present researchers with new challenges and fresh insights. As a rule, the traditional, empirical quantitative methodologies, with their emphasis on deductive reasoning “of deriving research questions or hypothesis from theoretical models and testing them against empirical evidence,” (ibid: 12) do not yield, for this study, the expected outcome due to the differentiation of values.

Instead of starting from known short story theories then testing or proving them against empirical evidence, the on-going research employs inductive strategies to extract from the respondents arguments that can build a thesis for the genre’s canon. The knowledge about the “life worlds” of the short story is limited for the research to start from a hypothesis then test the research findings against extant theory. As such, inductive logic is the ideal “sensitising concept,” (ibid: 12) of the African short story canon.

O’Leary (2014:130) justifies qualitative research as “a critique of positivism ... reigning epistemology and the recognition of the need for alternative ways to produce knowledge.” Along with O’Leary, the present research upholds qualitative research for its recourse to “inductive logic, appreciation of subjectivity, acceptance of multiple perspectives and realities, recognition of the power of the research itself over both the participants and researcher,” (ibid: 130). O’Leary furthers that the approach values in-depth exploration and understanding of interactions, processes, lived experiences and belief systems that are part of individuals, institutions and cultural groups. Such is the case of the short story. She insists that;

Delving into qualitative research methodologies, therefore, means working in a world that accepts and values the search for holistic meaning, research conducted in natural settings, emergent methodological designs, small number, non-random sampling, idiographic interpretation and even the possibility of negotiated outcomes that recognize the need for the researcher to be party to a researcher’s constructed meaning. The goal is to gain an intimate understanding of people, places, cultures and situations through rich engagement and even immersion in the reality being studied. (O’Leary, 2014:130).

In order to endorse the fundamentals and characteristics of qualitative research retained in O’Leary’s above citation, the current research maps an easy trajectory of inquiry. The researcher endeavours to collect data in the respondents’ natural settings; in the rural fields where short stories thrived and still thrive and where participants are practitioners of story-telling. The research also gathered close-up information by interviewing short story writers, critics, university graduates, lecturers and publishing agencies in their natural settings. The researcher collected the data in person through interviews, questionnaire and examining written documents such as short story anthologies and department of African Languages and Literature course outlines of various collegiate and university institutions. The questionnaires and interview formats were designed by the researcher to suit the emergent social situation of research.

All the data gathered through multiple methods such as interviews, observations and documents was, then, reviewed and organised into categories that incorporated all the data sourced. Inductive logic assisted the researcher to build patterns and themes out of these organised abstractions in order to establish a comprehensive set of knowledge about the short story canon. To nurture an informed research outcome, the researcher values the meaning that the participants hold about the short story corpus. The informants’ meaning helps the

researcher to develop multiple perspective or diverse views on the problem of canonisation of African short story. Out of all these complexities, the researcher aims to develop a holistic account of the short story canon. “Holistic bias” entails “everything to fit into the picture” (Robin, 1993:404). The holistic neutrality obtains from Robin’s (1993:402) placement of the researcher as “the human instrument,” who, according to Miles and Huberman (1984:230) “is a one-person research machine; defining the problem, doing the sampling, designing the instruments, collecting the information, reducing the information, analysing it, interpreting it, writing it up.” Thus the ultimate thesis documents the multiple perspectives of participants, identifies the many factors involved in gathering and collating the data and then sketches the larger holistic picture into which the short story canon can be contextualised. This reduces the chance of popularising the researcher’s pre-conceived ideas about the research problem without censor.

Suffice to state at this juncture that the study espouses qualitative research only as a data collection technique and not as a paradigm of analysis. Contrary to Creswell (2013:44) who perceives qualitative research as a theoretical “interpretive lens” for the “procedures involved in studying social and human problems,” the present study employs Afrocentric perspective alongside technauriture as paradigms of analysis. In a definition that emphasises its paradigmatic dimension Creswell perceives qualitative research as an “interpretive theoretical framework that informs the study or research problem addressing the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to a social or human problem,” (ibid: 44). Cognisant of Braun and Clarke’s (2013) argument that qualitative research can be used both as a technique and a framework for conducting research this study adopts their proposition that considers qualitative research as a technique for gathering and collating textual data. The study uses the qualitative technique to collect textual data in a series of representations that involve field notes, interviews, observations, conversations, questionnaire administration as well as written document or textual enquiry. Afrocentricity and technauriture exist as frameworks for the procedure of interpretation of the research problem and the final written presentation of the thesis.

This study uses qualitative research techniques in two kinds of data collection; primary and secondary data. The researcher will extract primary data from in-depth interviews and self-

completing questionnaires that non-randomly chosen participant give. Secondary data were accessed in both print and electronic forms. These include documented information about the Zimbabwe Literature Bureau, short story publications, graduate course curricular outlining the African prose literature course content, literary journal articles, essays and critical works. The following sub-section details these two kinds of data collection.

### **3.2.1 Primary Data: In-depth interviews and questionnaires**

According to O’Leary (2014:201) primary data is data collected by researchers “expressly for their research purpose,” hence, cannot “exist independent of the research process.” It is the very current data targeted at the specific issues of the research question. The researcher entirely owns the data. O’Leary considers interviews, surveys and questionnaires, as examples of primary research methods. This study, therefore, exploits in-depth, open-ended interviews and questionnaires as methods for sourcing primary data. As Patton (2002:4) posits, interviews and questionnaires tap direct quotations from informants “about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge.”

This study considers interviews and questionnaires as the most ubiquitous methods of obtaining primary information from those with it. Burgess (1984:102) regards an interview as “a conversation with a purpose” in the context of “knowledge excavation” and construction. Interviews determine “what people think, how they feel about given issues and what they believe in,” (Robin, 1993:189). The researcher structures the questions for the open-ended interviews. Unlike structured interviews whose closed questions “force the interviewee to choose from two or more fixed alternatives,” in-depth open-ended interview questions “provide no restrictions on the content or manner of the reply other than on the subject area” (Robin, 1993:233). Flexibility is one of the major tenets of the interview and questionnaire methods.

They allow the interviewer to probe so that he may go into more depth if he chooses, or clear up any misunderstandings...They encourage cooperation and rapport and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes. Open-ended [questions] can result in unexpected or unanticipated answers



which may suggest hitherto unthought-of relationships or hypotheses, (Cohen and Manion, 1989:313).

Thus self-completed questionnaires and open-ended interviews are “very efficient in terms of researcher time and effort” (Robin, 1993:243). They facilitate a convenient “study of issues in depth and detail ... [to] produce a wealth of detailed information,” (Patton, 2002:14) that describes and “takes us, as readers, into the time and place of the observation,” (ibid: 2002:46). The dynamic, non-linearity and flexibility of their execution allow concurrent data collection and analysis for the on-going research. Gwekwerere (2013:136) argues that such flexibility permits subsequent data collection and analysis procedures to be modified in light of earlier findings “to enable the gathering of more specific information and the exploration of new and unanticipated areas of interest.”

This study utilises face to face interviews, either on a one to one basis or in group discussions. Face-to-face interview method of data collection involves the researcher seeking direct open-ended answers to issues relative to the research question. The questions are designed cognisant of the intellectual background of participants. In face to face interviews, the researcher aims to explore reality from the viewpoint of the participants, to “see things the way group members do and grasp the meanings they use to understand and make sense of the world” (O’Leary, 2014:133). This helps the researcher to suspend pre-conceived ideas or judgements about the study question and to enter the world of the participants in order to interpret meaning from within their context. Such immersion permits the researcher a rich understanding of complexities of the research subject, (the short story canon) from the perspective of the participants.

Apart from face to face interviews the research also exploits the internet interview option. As observed by Jupp (2006:157) “developments in computer and information technology have resulted in other formats, for example internet interviews.” In this study, internet interviews offer the researcher the most convenient way of reaching out to participants. Electronic communication in the context of interviewing reduces travelling expenses, especially in cases where short story practitioners, writers and critics, publishers and academics are geographically dislocated. Jupp (2005:157) augments;

In some contexts and for some purposes interviews may be conducted by telephone or by way of electronic communication such as email or fax. Interviews of this nature are popular for reasons of cost effectiveness and for the speed of data collection.

The cost effective Internet mediated interviews and questionnaires eliminate the research's need for physical access to dislocated informants. However, in electronic interviews information is collected in designated "places" of interviewees rather than in the natural field setting of the research problem. This stifles the intimacy gained by face to face or in person interviews.

The researcher anticipates the production of biased responses by informants to be the major challenge of relying on interviews and questionnaires. Robin (1993:383) alerts, "the trustworthiness of the data is always a worry" when data is gathered through interviews and questionnaires where information may either be withheld or fabricated. Creswell (2003:186) worries that "indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees" may not be "equally articulate and perceptive." The researcher concedes Robin's (1993: 236) view that "it is virtually impossible to determine whether the respondent is giving serious attention to the questions or regarding the exercise as a tedious chore to be completed in a perfunctory manner." Data collected through interviews and questionnaires will only be used to establish general trends since the researcher assumes the data may not yield the expected outcome.

However, the reliability and validation of research outcomes can be ameliorated "through source comparison" (Robin, 1993:383). He further notes:

If two sources give the same messages, then, to some extent, they cross-validate each other ... if there is a discrepancy, its investigation may help in explaining the phenomenon of interest, (Ibid: 383).

The researcher also resorts to documents analysis in order to mitigate the challenges of superficiality that may obtain from interviews and questionnaires. These involve primary and secondary sources of documented data. Short story collections and university course outlines form the core of primary documents whilst critical works suffice for secondary sources.

### 3.2.2 Secondary Data: Written Documents

O’Leary (2014:243) perceives secondary data as pre-existing and situational information that is available regardless of the researcher’s questioning, prompting or probing. This is existing data the researcher gathers and analyses from “documents, databases or on the internet” none of which the researcher created “for the purpose of his or her research project,” (ibid: 243). Patton (2002:4) argues that written document analysis studies “excerpts, quotations and entire passages from...publications and reports, personal diaries and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys.” According to Braun and Clarke (2013:152) this is “textual data,” which the researcher collects from sources in “printed copy, electronic or broadcast media formats.”

The current research analyses selected Zimbabwean short stories, either anthologised in print or published online. There is neither time-line nor gender biased criteria for the selection of the stories. The research reconnoitres the earliest evidence of short story writing in Zimbabwe tracing its trajectory up to the recent times of the genre’s unprecedented upsurge. The selection will feature collections representative of respective epochs. For instance, the Zimbabwe Women Writers’ anthology of short stories, *Masimba* (1996,) and Chiwome’s *Masango Mavi* (1998) herald the end of the genre’s almost forty years interregnum. Chirere’s *Tudikidiki* (2007) chronicles the genre’s proliferation that is almost drowning the novel. The study makes no strict language precepts for the study of Zimbabwean short stories. Thus short stories written in the predominant languages of Zimbabwe; ChiShona, IsiNdebele and English, will be explicated. The researcher contends that an African writer who opts to write in English or languages of European origin does not necessarily become European. The author always informs the acquired language tropes with native expressions. With respect to the language of writing Ojaide (2009:5) asserts that African writers proceed by two ways. Either by Anglicisation of local languages when they retain European words in native language discourses or by indigenisation of European language forms when they utilise proverbs and other traditional speech tropes. Henceforth, the question of the author’s language of mediation is not topical in this exposition.

The researcher also collects for analysis the various course outlines of programmes offered in University departments of African Languages where the short story genre is a component. The researcher will compare the various collegiate and university institutional curricular or

syllabi to determine the prominence given to the short story genre. The data sourced from curricular information is ideal for answering question about canonical representation of the genre. It helps the researcher to ascertain who determines a given canon and how. The study of these course outlines assists the research to project the fragmented view of institutional cultures that influence the development of a particular literary canon. The researcher compares these fragmented canonical cultures to assess the meaning that make up the shared reality and influenced perception of the short story canon.

The researcher utilises secondary archival sources in the form of journal articles, literary essays and critical commentaries in order to enrich the research subject. Basic information about the activities of the now defunct Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, for instance, is accessible in archival sources. The colonial Rhodesian government policies on education are documented in archived histories, either in critical works or the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Silverman (2011:230) argues that a “close analysis of written texts reveals presentational subtleties and skills.” The richness obtains from locating these documented sources and acknowledging their contribution to the research under hand. Besides benefiting from the convenience of accessibility, the researcher enjoys limited ethical constraints when excavating from these archival documents.

Although the researcher does not guarantee the credibility of these written texts, their use “addresses truth-related issues,” (ibid: 231). Secondary data collated from collection of short stories, course outlines and critical works project the subjective end the researcher seeks to construct, that the short story is the primary discourse force of Zimbabwean prose genres. They help the researcher to interpret the conflicting aspects of African literary canon. The source of the interpretive divergence will be located within these documentary conventions. This provides the researcher with an opportunity to validate the reality that exists outside his subjective interpretation.

O’Leary appeals to researchers to be cautious about the use of documented data. She observes that textual data is “indirect data where interaction does not involve the researcher,” (ibid: 2014:243). As a rule researchers should be careful not to taint it. O’Leary also notes

that secondary data has alternative purpose and may not be as current and relevant to the research as primary data. There are trade-offs that may cause a “double crisis of representation and legitimation” in the use of secondary data (Flick, 2013:97). The crisis of representation manifests itself in what Flick (2013:97) considers the “experience and text problematic,” in which the researcher may not “directly capture the lived experience as created in the social text.” The crisis of legitimation may exhibit in the researcher’s failure to sustain a “reality existing outside subjective or socially shared viewpoints ... on which we can validate its representation in texts,” (ibid: 97). However, these “trade-offs” are worth exploring here, especially in the context of Zimbabwean literary canon where much data about colonial policies on native education is in archival documents. Not much is known about the short story canon as compared to that of the novel. A plausible reconstruction of this yawning absence requires interrogating pre-existing documents on colonial policies of Bantu Education, the Native Affairs Department and the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau. Much of these colonial government agents’ activities are documented.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

The chapter discussed the research’s theoretical and methodological background. The main theoretical construct informing the research is Afrocentricity. This study contends that any serious work of art should reflect African peoples as subjects and not objects of history. As Tembo (2012:59) argues, “Every Afrocentric critic, therefore, must focus on and invest energy in depicting Africans as inevitable creators.” Afrocentric scholarship underscores the primacy of the short story genre in Zimbabwean prose narratives. Gray (2001:91) observes that Afrocentric thinkers and practitioners “are clear about the fact that African people are not only the parent-people but the parent-civilisation of world civilisation.” This argument concurs with the contention that Zimbabwean prose literature did not become great with the advent of the novel. Rather, the crux of the matter is that the short story is the cradle of prose fiction. The primacy of African people and African civilization is, actually, one of the essential tenets of Afrocentric scholarship, according to Gray (2001). It has been argued that Afrocentric scholarship studies the origins of people’s tradition or civilisation. Gray posits that any Afrocentric work must celebrate the indisputable truth that Africa is the mother of

civilisation. Thus Afrocentricity is committed to locating the primacy of contemporary short story within the axis of undocumented primordial folkloric prose narratives.

Kaschula's coinage, 'technauriture,' has also been retained as a paradigm to negotiate the slide into internet and computer mediated literature. This is a model that can be used to analyse the interface between the oral, written and electronically mediated technologies. However, technauriture is adopted as merely an ontological tool to aide Afrocentricity. It is not adopted as a distinct model operating independently.

The research methodology pliable for this study has been argued to be qualitative research technique. It has been chosen for its emphasis on inductive logic that permits the researcher a great deal of subjectivity. The research gathers data through two main qualitative techniques; primary and secondary sources. Primary data is sourced through in-depth interview, questionnaires and group discussions. Secondary data is accessed through written documents in the form of archival data, literary articles, essays, journal and critical works. Overall, the research should be cautious of ethical consideration in data gathering and synthesis.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

*Contemporary reflections on ideologies of canon-formation take their place within the context of cultural heterogeneity, political struggles and academic dissensions; a context which itself is a particular historical reading of our prevailing critical struggle for canonical status in the midst of the battle over literary canon-formation, (West, 1987:199).*

### 4.0. Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed theoretical as well as methodological issues. The rationale for employing Afrocentric philosophical perspective as the theoretical launch-pad upon which Africulture and technauriture paradigms can be harnessed to interrogate the short story canon has been justified. Qualitative research method and techniques have been identified as the ideal data gathering mechanisms. Primary and secondary data collection techniques were outlined. The researcher interviewed Zimbabwean literary critics, academics, students, short story writers and publishers to gain informed and insightful reflections on Zimbabwean short story genre.

This and the subsequent chapter offer a critical exegesis of the research findings in order to unravel seminal issues germane to the complex location of short story canon. Chapter Four presents research findings emanating from interviewees focusing specifically on the short story canon obtaining in curricula content of Zimbabwean schools and collegiate institutions. A generic overview of the complexities and contradictions resident within Zimbabwean literary canon helps to illuminate the close analysis of actual short story narratives in subsequent chapter. This general outlook builds a background upon which the particular, (Short story) can be interrogated. Since the core of the research is challenging present scholarship's most compelling polarisation of hegemonic versus non-hegemonic representation of the novel/ the short story canon, a wider discursive continuum is necessary to offer a convenient background foregrounding an in-depth analysis of short story texts. Thus it is imperative to deconstruct the Zimbabwe literary canon in order to unravel factors embedded in marginalisation of the genre. The aim is to establish the extent to which peripheral existence of short fiction is a function of the eccentricities of colonial educational structure such as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau. Problematisation of the SRLB and its cronies helps to expose how the least studied short genre of African/Zimbabwean

literature complements (or exists in contradistinction to) the novel in capturing the realities of life.

The subsequent chapter analyses selected print anthologies as well as electronically circulating short stories with a view to show that writers (much more than the critics) recognise the potency and primacy of the short story. The discussion problematises the dialectics of the print/ electronic interface that global multi-media and digital technologies embed. The discussion clinches that canonicity and the very concept of canonical representation has become problematic as the multi-media environment closes in on literary perception. While the acceptance of digital literature within the mainstream Zimbabwean literary canon is still in the blind spot, the electronic short story genre witnesses that Zimbabwean literature is gradually occupying virtual or cybernetic space and this importation is bringing new challenges to raging debates on African literature. The ultimate goal of the research is to incite new dimension to debating the African literary condition. The re-affirmation of the idea that ‘small’ is ‘great’ within contemporary canonical battles is fundamental to circumventing crude unidimensional approach to African prose literature that reifies the novel as the sole instrument of narrative form.

#### **4.1. The complex location of Zimbabwean short story canon**

The Zimbabwean short story presents a deeply embedded canonical complexity within the academe. The interviewees as well as surveys of literary curricula content of the local universities could not locate any substantive position that can define a unanimous base for a historical and socio-cultural study of the short story across institutions. Early critics of national literature of the transitional era (between 1980 and the late 1990s) nurture a conservative indebtedness to the idea of the African novel as the “objective reality of [creative] greatness,” hence resent acknowledging the primacy of the short story sceptical that the “masterpieces would remain untaught” (Bona and Maimi, 2006:7). This self-perpetuating canonical otherness of the short story is widespread, not only within Zimbabwean intellectual institutes, but across African academic communities.



However, the concrete manifestation of post-independence national literature and its canon-forming establishment is the University of Zimbabwe, (UZ). The university, formerly University of Rhodesia, was established in 1952 following a series of British committees and recommendations to institute university education in their colonies (Ngugi, 1999). Since the new university college was an external affiliate of the University of London, (for sponsorship, accreditation and degree certification purposes) the pioneer African scholars who were couched in English literary tradition became the chief architects of Zimbabwe national literature. The University of Zimbabwe maintains a complex relationship with its affiliate institutions such as ZIMSEC, (secondary school examination and governing body,) Teachers' Colleges and other local state universities. As such, it yields a hierarchical power structure that subtly binds and elicits allied institutions to comply with its notion of a national literary canon.

University of Zimbabwe's Faculty of Arts hosts two departments responsible for literary studies. The Department of African languages and Literature as well as the Department of English retain the authority to define, impose and validate valuations of the indigenous languages and English-mediated Zimbabwean literary canons, respectively. This implies that Zimbabwean literature is a mixed grill comprising literature written in indigenous African languages and in English, a foreign language. Since Zimbabwean national literature is a mixed lattice-work of indigenous and English mediated languages, critics' parochial appeal to the short story genre is a matter of faculty unit or departmental tastes, dividing along linguistic boundaries. The polarised orientation of the two departments of literature is a matter of ideological and theoretical configuration. Ideologically, indigenous African languages literary culture experienced the most acute influence of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau impositions compared to its counterpart (Chiwome, 1996). Zimbabwean literature in English lends itself to alternative Eurocentric models of the invented 'posts;' "post-nationalist, post-colonial/ post-structuralist" as theoretical grounding to configure its canon (Veit-Wild, 2006:196). The influence of Western formalist realism within the Department of English results in its subordination of the short story. Whereas literature in English thrived on Westphalian literary criticism for providing theoretical background shaping its perception of the short fiction (Chennells, 1982; Zimunya, 1982; Zhuwarara, 1991 and Veit-Wild, 1993) critics of indigenous African languages literature struggled on

theory. The quest for an African oriented theory saw Ngara's (1982) and Kahari's (1990) Marxist realism transform to Chiwome's (1996) 'socio-historical' approach. The 1990s witnesses a great inclination towards Asante's Afrocentric theoretical models evident in Gambahaya (1998) Muwati (2009) Gwekwerere (2013) and Tembo's (2012) critical endeavours.

These twofold positions, although disparate, produce a narrowing focus on the short story corpus and are, therefore, elitist. Indigenous African languages' approach do not invite re-thinking the short story because the established set of canonical rules keeps short stories out while simultaneously keeping the novel in. Literature in English accords the short story some space within its hierarchical power structure "narrowly limited to maintain a pretentious but necessary elitism" (Bona and Maimi, 2006:10) that gives a sense of canonical order. Whether or not the espousal of these contrasting modalities is traceable to the Southern Rhodesia literature Bureau's deleterious effects is a serious bone of contention. Whereas scholarly consensus holds the Bureau responsible for defining the strictures of indigenous literary identity (as discussed in chapter two,) it is debatable whether the liminal nature of the short story in general is attributable to its machinations. Miller's (2013) opines that canon structures identity which, ultimately, contributes to the construction of narratives. "These narratives then have a reciprocal effect on the canon, defining what can and cannot be included" (Miller, 2013:24). Is it apparent that pioneer critics of Zimbabwean literature adopted the stereotypical Victorian arrogance that literature only became great with the production of the novel? What then, accounts for the critics' perceived attitudinal silence or indifference to the existence of the short story as a distinct form?

The contemporary millennium witnesses unprecedented proliferation of short story writing exciting new provocations for debating African literature. This upsurge presents new challenges to the inconsistencies of existing literary canons. Incorporation of the short story discourse into the restrictive canon is not without problems. It incites an enduring contestation between existing traditional literary model and neo-liberal pluralism that has erupted with globalisation, multi-media and digital technologies which favour short fiction as a medium of its expression. The new phenomenon seems to be committed to the "transformation of perception that occurs when a traditional category is shattered by adding a range of different works" (Lauter, 1983: xxiii). In some academic institutions the recognition

and affirmation of diversity permits coexistence of the novel and short story as complementary fictional genres. Cognisant of the impact of global multi-media and digital technologies on African literature, the emergent crop of critics challenge the status quo and advocate for review of canonical tastes. It is within this context that the research was conducted. The upcoming discussion presents the complex condition of dislocation of the short story genre within indigenous African languages and English conflictual ideological positions as obtaining from piloted interviews.

#### **4.1.1. African languages literatures' short story disinterest, (1980 – late 1990s)**

An analysis of the curricular content of Zimbabwean indigenous African languages literature in schools, colleges and Universities indicates a literature that incepted in an austerity mode. As Zhuwarara (2001) observes, incumbent upon the attainment of independence, (in 1980) a somewhat belated, slow and often laborious national literature emerged. The quantitative-cum-qualitative limitedness of literary production as well as the structural problems of publication and distribution validates the sparse presence of the short story genre within Zimbabwean national literature of this transitional period. A cross-section of the interviewed intellectuals, students, writers and publishers document a patent case of the canonical neglect of the short story genre, particularly within the indigenous languages literary turf.

As surveyed, Shona short stories began featuring, albeit intermittently, as set books in secondary school and collegiate syllabi and as subject of critical scholarship in the late 1990s with the publication of Zimbabwe Women Writers' anthology, *Masimba* (1996) and Chiwome's *Masango Mavi* (1998). This is in spite of the fact that *Ndakatongwa Nenyika Mbiri Nedzimwe Nyaya Pfupi* (1976), *Matende Mashava* (1982), *Hondo YeChimurenga* (1984), *Ndakazviita* (1985) and *Mati Manzwei?* (1990) had earlier been published. Notwithstanding its conspicuous presence in the pre- and post-independence literary magazines the short story has always been haunted by the fear of parochialism. The genre had been associated with limited or narrow-mindedness so much that *Mataka Kumafuro* (1975,) *Moto Muziso* (1976,) *Dundundu Ipfinbi* (1978), *Nhamo Ine Nharo* (1978) *Ushingi HwaGochwa* (1979) and *Panomera Muswe Panonyeredza* (1979) were and still are classified as African entertainment and popular pamphlet collections. They were never catalogued as

short stories and to-date none of these appears either in critical deliberations or reading lists of local universities cartographies.

The leading critics domiciled in the Department of African Languages and Literature, which is responsible for the study of Shona and Ndebele literature, register a peculiar institutionalised aversion of the short story. They harbour an exclusionary view of the short story inherently selective and potentially restrictive in its totalising criterion that works on the basis of an inside/outside apposition. In an interview with the researcher Itai Muwati, a professor and chairperson of the Department, debriefs the departmental attitude towards the genre:

Literary scholarship on Zimbabwean literature has to a large extent been fashioned by the production and editorial preferences of the [Rhodesia] Literature Bureau. This is to say that the Literature Bureau had a stupendous preference for the novel and this is what one finds in abundance on Zimbabwe's literary cartography. Most scholars, such as Chiwome, Kahari and Muwati have therefore prioritised the novel as their primary anchor. The short story has not really been very popular among the leading critics of Shona/Zimbabwean literature. In recent times, Muwati has however analysed short stories particularly on women – e.g. "*Light a candle.*"

Muwati insinuates that the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau instituted canonical hierarchies which privileged the dominance of the novel as common sense. The constituent of the short story, within this hierarchy, was relegated as a non-aesthetic cultural aberration. The Bureau was indifferent to 'bad art' and oblivious of presumably political and religious art. Within this divide, the short story was considered parochial because its perceived primordial nature encouraged African cultural and religious partisanship instead of the cherished Western universal values. Thus the short story experienced the most acute effects of exclusion. The African literary canon has been deprived of not only the genre's potency but of its motivated African cultural expression and 'disinterested' truthful depiction of reality.

Soon after independence the Department of African Languages and Literature engaged in a new task of creating "new language, rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentering authority and rewriting the institutional and discursive borderlands" in which their new policies became "a condition reasserting their canon" (Reaves and Gibson, 2013:9). The freedom of literary experimentation bolstered by independence suggests that liberation was not only about political or economic emancipation of the Black race. It liberated Zimbabwean

literature from the straightjackets of colonial bureaucratic formalism. It endowed and envisaged the flexibility of creative experimentation long overdue. However, such experimentation failed to transcend colonially created myth of the novel as the unquestionable ‘great literary tradition’ latterly to be assimilated in secondary schools and the allied colleges and universities. The UZ version of African literature soon became the nationally recognised curricula construct permeating the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council, (ZIMSEC), Teachers’ Colleges and universities affiliated to it. This is captured in the UNESCO report on Zimbabwean education which declares:

The curriculum constitutes the legal framework for the development of teaching/learning activities. It should respond to the needs of the society and to the needs of individuals. The curriculum development process, therefore, involves close co-ordination between a variety of stakeholders and institutions. Curriculum development work cannot be done in isolation. Because of this, decisions about curriculum issues are made in close consultation with the learners, parents, teachers, heads of schools, education officers in the regions, the examinations council, subject specialists, commerce and industry, teachers colleges and universities.” (UNESCO – Government of Zimbabwe 2001)

Gondo and Gondo (2012:143) elaborate on the interlaced co-relationship between the school, colleges and local universities:

Zimbabwe has 14 teachers’ colleges, 7 polytechnic colleges and 12 universities. Of these institutions, 11 teachers’ colleges and 2 universities are involved in the training of primary school teachers, using a system where all trainee teachers are trained to teach one of the two or both of the national indigenous languages (ChiShona or IsiNdebele) among the other subjects that are taught. Among the 14 Teachers’ Colleges, 3 are private and church-run, whilst the rest are government institutions. Only two Teachers’ Colleges train secondary school teachers while ten are primary school Teachers’ Colleges. However, all Teachers’ Colleges in Zimbabwe are affiliated to the University of Zimbabwe’s Department of Teacher Education (D.T.E.) through a scheme of association. It is the Department of Teacher Education that supervises the training of teachers in Teachers’ Colleges, so that all primary school teachers who are trained by Teachers’ Colleges in Zimbabwe receive their certificates or diplomas from the University of Zimbabwe. The University of Zimbabwe approves all syllabi documents and examines the candidates, albeit on a semi-autonomous scheme of association where the course content is not exactly the same in all colleges.

The University of Zimbabwe worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Development Unit to institute structural reform programs to transform the education and syllabi system. Musarurwa and Chimhenga (2011:175) elicit:

As noted by Yolo (1986) most countries in Anglophone Africa (Zimbabwe included) institutionalized the search for relevance in educational content by setting

up national curriculum development centres, whose task was that of preparing curriculum materials hence localization of content was one of the ways of achieving curriculum relevance. In 1980 Zimbabwe created the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). It had the mandate to develop ZJC and O level syllabuses, teaching materials like pupils and teachers modules as well as approving textbooks for use in both primary and secondary schools. These educational resources had to be produced in line with the country's chosen ideology of Socialism then.

In spite of these significant changes, literature remained strangulated. The stakeholders popularised the predominant novel, drama and poetry as acceptable genres of literature. Fiction was exclusively defined in terms of the novel. Prior to the publication of *Masango Mavi* (1998) almost all preceding short story anthologies are conspicuously absent from the mainstream school, college or university curricula and critical deliberations.

A respondent concedes that Catholic University that incepted in 1999 channelled its Shona literary canon after that of UZ African languages literature. He acknowledges that UZ Department of African Languages and Literature is the premier architect of Catholic University's curricula. Initially, lectures at Catholic University were delivered by UZ lecturers on a contractual basis. Hence, Catholic University pedagogy became an extension of UZ curriculum. As such, the short story rarely features, and if it does, it is retained not because of its distinctiveness of form but thematic concerns that should complement those of the novel. In an interview Muwati avers that the leading scholars, "such as Chiwome, Kahari and Muwati ... prioritised the novel as their primary anchor." The short story has not really been very popular among these leading critics of Shona/Zimbabwean literature. Kahari's (1982:109) inaugural lecture bears witness:

As a Department of African Languages and Literature, we are properly in the business of explaining and evaluating [the curriculum], in other words, we translate the concrete into the abstract and vice versa, and this is an important function to assume in a new state. In realizing the form of the Shona novel – the traditional folktale, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, riddles and generally its past as well as its present background – the Department is well equipped to handle these genres as separate issues of the greater form; the novel.

Kahari's fascination with metaphysical empire of the novel underestimates the ideological weight of the Western literary criticism on emergent African literature. The contingencies of values he places on "the great form; the novel" leads Kahari to sentimentally glorify the architect of colonially biased literary canon, George Fortune's intellectual acumen.

There is a team the selection of which was the responsibility of the first incumbent of the Chair and Head of the Department of Languages, George Fortune, to whom I am indebted. He was a man of great scholarship, a man with tremendous vision... in his honour and in conformity with the foundations that he laid in the department, we have changed our name to 'Department of African Languages and Literature' to reflect this, (Kahari, 1990:109).

Ironically, the foundations Fortune had laid in the department established a fixed notion of the novel as an accumulative and widely shared literary tradition. Fortune's foundations equipped Kahari and cohorts with analytical lenses to handle the short story, among other oral art-forms, "as separate issues of the great form." While Fortune's legacy is extolled, his approach to the study of African languages literature is colonially blinkered and arrogant. His philosophy is couched in "terms of Whiteman imposing their own standards and norms" on African Languages (Johnson, 2015:3, web.) African literature under the tutelage of Fortune was overwhelmingly ethnographic in its treatment of black expressions "with all the attendant problems of othering and fixing representation in condescending and ahistorical terms," (ibid: 3). Kahari's excitement blinded him from realising the paternalistic cum political implications of Fortune's commitment to the development of 'autonomous' African literary and cultural base. Whereas Kahari's inaugural lecture presents their new literary canon as entirely negotiable, the retention of the Shona novel as the sole idyllic fictional reservoir of African cultural sensibilities is a negation of the same virtues of versatility the new state had bestowed upon them. It creates a community of absence and fragmentation in which the short story is invidiously excluded from the sphere of Shona cultural production and meaning-making.

Early critics tapped from African tradition a 'usable past' (Lauter, 1983:446) to define the social and cultural context within which indigenous African language fiction (the novel) could be perceived. The "usable past," out of which they constructed their literary canon was, unfortunately, in consonant with the SRLB's definition of indigenous African languages literature. The definition imposed fixed ideologically idiosyncratic views of history and culture on African intellectualism. This resulted in critics, such as Kahari, categorically denying the short story a place within the inceptive canon for being surrealistic rather than realistic and historical rather than fictional or imaginative. The synopsis of these contradictions presents a complicated and aleatory contraction of the indigenous literary canon to colonial education systems. Conversely, emerging intellectualism was contingent upon the very literary tradition it sought to replace. Just as the SRLB shot down any

proposals wherein the presumed “rhetoric was a formidable opponent” to its dictates, the early critics nurtured a literary tradition whose very existence implied that canonical rules were not meant to be challenged or even broken (Reaves and Gibson, 2013:9). The rejection of the short story was inevitable despite the fact that independence permitted a cross-over. The seeming subversive genre did not respond to the institutionalised canonical ideology, hence, could not reach a cross-over success. The Kaharis of the day did not seek to change the notion of African languages literature they inherited from predecessors. Rather they honoured their presence and acceptance within the institutions by preserving the status quo.

The critics’ inertia permeates the artistic, (writers) as well as the publishing industries causing the conspicuously sluggish production of the genre. To-date virtually few Shona short story collections, whether single or multi-authored have been published after independence. Though the list is not exhaustive very few publications would have been left if one considers *Ndakatongwa Nenyika Mbiri Nedzimwe Nyaya Pfupi* (1976), *Matende Mashava* (1982), *Hondo YeChimurenga* (1984), *Ndakazviita* (1985), *Mati Manzwei?* (1990), *Masimba* (1996), *Masango Mavi* (1998), *Totanga Patsva* (2005), *Tudikidiki* (2007) and *Mazambuko: Nyaya DzemuZimbabwe Dzakaturikirwa* (2011). Though the production of the genre has been intermittent, these publications stimulate challenges about the need to abort Kahari’s approach of defending the ‘great novel’ with the ecclesiastical zeal for revered Biblical texts indicative of the theological origin of ‘canon.’ The contemporary UZ department of indigenous African languages literature, for instance, has now adopted an integrationist approach that interweaves the analysis of Zimbabwean short stories with the novel. Muwati attests that “in Shona we now have *Masimba*, *Masango Mavi* and *Hondo YeChimurenga*, yes but not very often.” This trend has become phenomenal. According to Chigidi, at Midlands State University, (MSU), the short story “is valued as an important art form but it’s definitely treated as less important than the novel. It is not prescribed in equal measure as the novel is.” Chigidi furthers that MSU Department of African Languages and Culture analyses the genre along the parameters of novel. “Like the novel it uses language, it has characters, themes, plot, setting, some form of conflict etc. It is, therefore, a novel in miniature.” Chigidi’s position is confirmed by MSU fellow lecturer, Tembo, who holds that “silencing the short story in the classroom and concentrating on the novel is rather parochial. All art must be studied.”



#### 4.1.2. The Short Story Subordination within Zimbabwean Literature in English

Mungoshi, the forebearer of the genre in English had to endure the misery of the exorcism of his pioneering collection from the Bureau's official circuit. His pioneer collection of English short stories, *Coming of the Dry Season*, (1972) published in Nairobi, Kenya, in a series of new fiction from Africa, could not escape the SRLB's censor. One of the stories, '*The Accident*' was adjudged to be a subtle political attack on the Rhodesian government, prompting its subsequent ban in 1975. Marechera's 'long short story,' (euphemism for novella or novelette,) *The House of Hunger*, was published in 1978. This literary production could not easily be classified under short story section because of its intense and personal point of view that was considered foreign, exotic and sophisticated for the African readership. Riemenschneider, (1989) prevaricates on whether *The House of hunger* is a novel or short story. He maintains that its categorisation is not a matter of consideration. As Chirere (2013, web) contends, the Zimbabwean short story genre had not yet been enlisted as a compositional literary type akin to the English or American counterpart by then.

The "dearth of critical appreciation and focus on the short story genre" in Zimbabwean literature is conspicuous (Mushakavanhu, 2013:130). He explains:

There is, in fact not one single study in Zimbabwean literature that specifically examines the short story genre in detail. Pioneer academics like Kizito Muchemwa, George Kahari and Musaemura Zimunya overlooked the importance of the short story. These writers dwell more on thematic and historical concerns, especially the sociological and cultural relevance of literary works produced in Zimbabwe, creating what Maurice Vambe terms 'the poverty of theory in Zimbabwean literature.'

In an interview a respondent cites scarcity as the major deterrent force for genre's early entry into the literary canon. She elicits:

The paucity of short story collections should also not be ignored. How sustainable could it be to have just a few texts included in the syllabus, and recycled repeatedly? Once texts are exhausted, it becomes tricky for item writers and educationists to have these included in the syllabus.

Whilst the dearth of short story cannot be overlooked, sympathising with the policy makers would be defeatist if the factors conditioning that rareness have not been fully conceptualised. One is compelled to question the cause of disequilibrium in publication, distribution and consumption between the novel and short story genres.

Magwa argues that Zimbabwean literature in English incepted as a miniature frame designed to fit European literary model.

Whatever the African wrote was considered to be a result of the influence they got from their European masters of the likes of Shakespeare. European critics of African literature conceive African cultures as static aspects of a society's material and spiritual achievement and characteristics at a particular stage in the process of social development, (Magwa, 2006:102)

Refusing to concede African literature as autonomous, with peculiar rules and standards, early Westphalian critics viewed Zimbabwean literature in English as an overseas department of European literature. Even then African literature in English was subordinated as inferior. The African novel was reproached for being too short to be taken serious. In comparison to the voluminous Western novel, the African novel appeared too poor and minute.

Euro-centric literary critics always view African literature as an appendage of European literature (Amuta, 1989). The African novel for example, is said to be thin in its plot, poor in characterisation, poor in the handling of time and unrealistic in dialogue. There are many other unfounded allegations against works of art written by Africans. Novels and plays by African writers, for example, are often being faulted for being too short and being too didactic as if African literature is intended to be a replica of European literature, (ibid: 102).

This peripheral treatment of African literature within the maze of world literature became endemic and cyclical. The classical European/novice African novel dichotomy in comparative World literature scaled down to reproduce the Zimbabwean Novel/ short story hierarchical relationship in which the short genre became a perverse choice of lower status. Thus early critics repose their appreciation of Zimbabwean literature in English on the colonial ideology, which was characterised by supremacist arrogance predicated on racial prejudice. African writers and critics were socialised to perceive literary genres in light of Western categories of novel, poetry and drama. The predication of national literature on Western frames of reference blurs innovation. Even at a time when the short fiction has flooded, critics still look elsewhere for explanations of the genre's proliferation. It is in this view that Chirere quizzes:

But, do we have a Zimbabwean short story or we have various individual short story writers who happen only to be domiciled in Zimbabwe? Is the short story in Zimbabwe able to stand by itself as a tradition? Is it seen as part of the prose tradition in Zimbabwe? (Chirere: web)

Chirere's worries resonate with views that locate the origin of short story in Edgar Allan Poe's nineteenth century appreciation of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (Grandsaigne and Spackey, 1983:73). It forecloses the idea that Zimbabweans are naturally story-tellers since time immemorial. They write short stories not because they learnt the technique elsewhere but because they must. The story is with them and in them.

Even though literature in English incorporated the short genre in its literary canon ever since the 1980s, its state of subalternity is underscored. An interview with one of the senior lecturers in the Department of English of the University of Zimbabwe intoned that short fiction is studied as the novel's lieutenant because 'it offers good training ground for writers.' The interviewee further argues that:

It also gives attention to a variety of thematic and topical issues that writers can explore differently. Writers' voices are read alongside other writers, making approaches to topical issues more objective and broader. For example, look at how *Hunting in Foreign Lands and Other Stories* treat the subject of migration of Zimbabweans and the Diaspora in the post-2000 period. Quite a minefield!

The respondent cautions that short fiction remains 'short' in comparison to the prestigious novel. The novel as masterpiece is perceived as able to create its "own audience, break through the limits of taste and perception and open readers to new experiences" (Lauter, 1983:450) that short fiction cannot. The respondent clinches, "Some short story writers never graduate from short story writing! It could be that novels demand higher order skills." As Wilcomb (2001) posits, literary culture assumes that the short fiction writers will eventually graduate into novel authors. Thus the short story is seen as "an interim form of expression, the writer's flirtation with fiction that will either lead to the legitimate novel or is legitimated by a prior novel," (Wilcomb, 2001:158).

Another respondent observed that the short story in English has been there in Zimbabwe, but was largely dominated by Charles Mungoshi, Dambudzo Marechera and Stanley Nyamfukudza. Their short story collections have always been subordinated to their novels. He confirmed that the parameters for understanding the short story had been set following Poe's dictum, the master of the American short story. The informant resolves that Poe's

emphasis upon formal and salient qualities of the short story as a discrete form erodes the concern for short story as distinctively Zimbabwean genre.

#### **4.1.3. Contemporary canonical dilemma: Beyond 2000**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the marginalised canon has the tendency to produce a counter hegemony to contest domination. The short story, perhaps out of the rage of exclusion, reproduced itself to become a regular feature in Zimbabwean literary productions of the new millennium. Whilst post-2000 publication of Shona and Ndebele short stories is intermittent, an average of two anthologies in English is published on yearly basis. These indigenous languages and English mediated short stories feature either in single or multiple authored print volumes courtesy of AmaBooks, Weaver Press and innumerable small and vanity presses. Online literary magazines such as *Mazwi* and *Munyori Literary Journals* feature electronic version of the short fiction. Independent bloggers such as KwaChirere exploit social media platforms, for instance, Facebook and Twitter, to circulate short stories for wider supranational audience. The short story integrates multi-media and digital technologies with commercial printing processes so much that its print text becomes a particular output form of the electronic text. Electronic overlap with the print tradition facilitates a unique networked generation of the short fiction that opens up new horizons of canonical literary representation. Literary prize culture instigated by Caine Prizes, among others, fuels the fermentation of the genre as writers compete to win awards. The unprecedented proliferation of short fiction has overshadowed the novel whose publication is gradually sinking into oblivion.

The record nourishment of the genre towards the turn of the millennium is a real challenge to existing critical models of appreciating Zimbabwean literary creativity. Although the challenge is still somewhat fragmented, concepts of hegemonic novel and non-hegemonic short fiction are opening up new directions of canonical representation. A great number of critics are beginning to question the conspicuous mismatch between the splintered novel/short story territories. As the short story creativity valence saturates the anxiety for a wider and inclusive literary canon, devoid of racialised boundaries of indigenous African

languages or English and short or longer narrative, is gaining intensity. While acknowledging that the core of Zimbabwean literature is an African writer representing African experiences and consciousness, contemporary critics have realised the need for a wider spectrum of canonical representation. Chirere (2012) advocates for a more complex approach that breaks away from a separatist study of Zimbabwean literature based on linguistic variations. For him, literature transcends language barriers that presently separate indigenous African languages from literature in English. Insisting that these different strands must be understood as parts of collective national discourse Chirere inscribes:

Criticism of Zimbabwean Literature has its various pitfalls. There are some fundamental questions that the community of Zimbabwean literary critics need to grapple with. For example, what use is it to study Charles Mungoshi's *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* in a Department of African Languages and Literature and his *Waiting for The Rain*, separately in a Department of English? Another question: why is it that Mutswairo's *Feso* is studied separately from Ndabaningi Sithole's *AmaNdebele KaMzilikazi* when both are pathfinder Zimbabwean novels about the very same early disgruntlement of Africans with colonialism? Is it just because one is in Shona and the other, Ndebele? (Chirere, 2012:1 web)

Chirere challenges Zimbabwean critics not to perceive literature as a repository of firm departmental persuasions but as socio-historical and cultural archive that documents in specific ways the innermost national consciousness. He quizzes:

Yet another question; is it not a misnomer that those who are considered specialists on Zimbabwean literature are just familiar with only one form of writing from Ndebele, Shona and English? How many of us can stand up to claim to be comfortable with all our three broad literatures? Would it not be exciting to read a Sigogo's novel translated from Ndebele to Shona to English or a Chiundura Moyo's novel translated from Shona to Ndebele to English? (Ibid).

Chirere complements Chiwome and Mguni (2012: iv) who argue for a comparative approach of Zimbabwean literature that breaks away from the "current compartmentalisation of national literature into ethnic entities in order to celebrate narrow sectional identities ... and movement away from bantustanisation of African culture." The term 'Bantustan' derives from South African apartheid policy's pejoration of black ethnic regionalism scorned for lacking real legitimacy and consisting of several unconnected enclaves. Thus, compartmentalisation of Zimbabwean literature into ethnic identities is not only abysmal but stifles prospects of broadening its horizons.

The pitfalls of Zimbabwean fiction that Chirere discloses are a tip of the iceberg where a lot can be unearthed. Issues of literary representation are surfacing in which the concept of 'representation' in terms of both 'inclusion' in canon and 'reflection' of societal experience and point of view is questioned. Paramount among them is the short story corpus that had previously been excluded in representation of socio-historical and cultural formations in which Zimbabwean literature exists. This fuels the on-going contention that Zimbabwean literary canon should not be a battlefield over representation against non-representation of the novel/short story dichotomies. Contemporary scholarship is inclining towards according the short story equal space as the novel as a reservoir of African/Zimbabwean historical and cultural memory, stimulating a non-hierarchical creative reception.

As the demand for a somewhat democratic non-hierarchical national literature becomes widespread, the need for an inclusive and relatively pluralistic canon is gaining currency, urging a complex task of "redefinition of the criteria and evaluative process" of the literary canon (Bona and Maimi, 2006:6). What makes the task a complicated maze is an exclusivist mentality deeply embedded in previous scholarship which perceives elevating the short genre to the canonical status of the novel as a form of idealised universalism only poised to retain an imperialist notion of imagined sameness. Thus the current aggregate of courses of study offered in local colleges and universities now acknowledges that the novel and short story co-exist and that their difference cross-fertilise. The canonical field is re-imagined as a space for multiple interpretations whereby the binary opposition of centre/periphery, difference/sameness or hegemonic/non-hegemonic representation re-defines overlapping 'scapes' of co-existence.

In the same way as the conception of Zimbabwean literature in terms of Shona, Ndebele or English ethnoscares is gradually losing currency so are contemporary critics attempting to bridge the complexities inherent in differencing the short story and the novel. The prospect of safety in uniting these strands makes canonical representation of the short story an imperative. The contention is that the short story that may readily qualify as 'classics' might go unrecognised if left out of circulation. The Great Zimbabwe University, (GZU) that incepted in 1999 charts a unique concept of literary canon that potentially includes without

restrictions, the short story genre. An interview with a former lecturer in GZU's Department of African Languages and Literature underscores the view of literary canon as not a given but negotiated enterprise, hence not natural but instituted:

I think that is a choice institutions have to make. As far as I know and from experience when I was still at Great Zimbabwe University, we were the only university in Zimbabwe that offered a course in the short story category. And this is in the area of African Languages and Literature. All subjects in African Languages at GZU, Ndebele, Shona, XiTsonga (Shangani) and Venda offer this. In first year this course is offered in Shona as *Nhungamidzo kuNganonyorwa neNyaya Pfupi dzeChiShona* (Introduction to the Shona Novel and Short Story). By the time I left this had been changed to *Nhungamidzo kuNyayanyorwa dzeChiShona* (Introduction to Shona Fiction).

This intimates that institutions have power to constitute autonomous canons a view reminiscent of Reaves and Gibson's (2006) constellation of canon as normative to the institution from which it emanates. Thus canonisation propagates the ideals of its institutional power structure at a given time. As Gondo and Gondo argue, GZU exercises some great measure of autonomy.

Great Zimbabwe University is not affiliated to the University of Zimbabwe and runs its own undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in primary education. It offers both in-service and pre-service programmes with a bias in one curriculum subject as an area of specialization (Gondo and Gondo, 2012:143)

The relationship between canon and institutional autonomy presupposes that canonical process can be more even-handedly negotiated in a socially progressive manner. A former member of the Great Zimbabwe University teaching establishment explains:

When I was at GZU, we put a lot of value on the novel and short story. This is best explained by what I stated earlier on. The value of the two as equal is seen in the fact that in year two and three, the two are treated equally with each given the status of a course with equal weighting. The books are prescribed by the lecturer concerned with the approval of the Department or subject area which sits down to discuss the suitability of the texts.

A similar disposition towards liberal literary canon is maintained at Solusi University, an independent church-run institution. An excerpt from its course outline cited below presents the African novel and short story as distinct genres open to equal and unmitigated aggregation, irrespective of the Shona, Ndebele or English dispensation:

Each genre is discussed as a full-fledged construction, and features of each are highlighted. The course examines the source of the inspiration of the author vis-à-vis

popular lore, custom and pertinent issues in the changing world. The sociological setting, technique of writing and what it achieves are given equal weighting in the analyses. A selection of novels and short stories are recommended for close study.

Elicited here is concern for equal representation of fictional genres in which case each genre is considered as dynamic and self-reflective. Thus, canonicity is a vocation that calls “everything and ultimately itself to question” (Franke, 2011:71). It constitutes itself as a trans-historical community of texts whose legacy survives through a constant “dynamic interplay between each new text and an unpredictable number of antecedent texts, norms and conventions” (Ungureanu, 2011:96). In institutions where canon is a liberal constituent African literature transcends hierarchical boundaries. The canonists seem to have taken heed of Guillory’s convocation to abandon classifying literary products in “hierarchical terms of the very best but to a rather relaxed way of simply comparing these products in terms of what the difference between them is, not which is the best” (Guillory in Ungureanu, 2011:94).

Contemporary institutions escape the risk of monumentalising the novel by elevating the once mortified short story to the status of canonicity. Critics invest the same interest in the short story form as in the novel to determine the range of socio-historical and cultural experiences for canonical representation. The curriculum inclination of local universities suggests that literary canon should be more inclusive. An interview with one of the senior lecturers within the University of Zimbabwe’s Department of English revealed the imperative need for defining and expanding the literary canons to include short stories in unrestrictive terms in order to help

...peoples claim and stamp intellectual, psychological and territorial spaces. Why should people be shy about having their own distinctive literary canon, if not making themselves to other ‘superior’ canon! Self-define, self-name, self-describe and authenticate identity through quality literary productions. It is also part of establishing links and networks with others when it comes to comparative literature. People cannot compare what has not been published, because virtually, circulation would be quite limited and highly subjective.

Canonicity should not be defended as a subjective variable too difficult to rationally define. Gates (1992:19) accentuates the necessity of an enlarged canon accommodative of the voices of the othered texts:

To reform core curriculums, to account for the comparable eloquence of the African, the Asian and the Middle Eastern traditions, is to begin to prepare our students for



their role as citizens of world cultures through a truly human notion of humanities rather than ... as guardians of the last frontier outpost of white male western culture [and] keepers of the masterpieces.

As a measure to evade subdivision or partial representation of fictional modes nascent critics break “historiographic organisation of the body of literature into conventional periods and themes,” (ibid: 440) to determine what to and what not to include in curricula. For most local universities today, historical and cultural frameworks determine the basis for selecting the works that fit a given canon and obscuring those which do not fit. Chigidi argues that MSU Department of African Languages and Culture uses ‘inclusivity’ as criterion to determine their curricula:

We use inclusivity, i.e. are both the novel and the short story included? Are those that deal with the ‘old world’ and those that deal with modernity included? Are those written before and those written after Zimbabwe’s independence included? Are different genres included e.g. War novels, detective stories etc.? These are some of the most important determining factors.

According to Muwati, UZ’s Department of African Languages and Literature considers the writers’ sensibilities, the literary product’s “potential for consciousness building, re-Africanisation of consciousness as well as possibilities for understanding the economic, social and political dynamics in the nation.” Great Zimbabwe University considers periods and themes as convenient pigeonholes in which to place fictional texts into syllabi. Responding to the question about the criteria GZU uses to determine its syllabi one respondent says:

Usually it is themes as well as a mix of different periods when texts were published. At times being new is another criterion that is used to determine which book to include among prescribed texts.

The respondent alludes to the short story’s characteristic brevity, freedom of form as well as unrestricted invention and creativity as suitable for the transmission of content, (theme) across historical and cultural periods.

The predominant view within the contemporary milieu is that today’s literary canon should not exclusively be settled into established patterns and roles of departmental curricula. It should be determined not only by what students study in schools, colleges and universities but in retrospection by what artists, writers and institutions such as museums and publishing houses select as the legitimating historical and cultural ideology. Henceforth, without canonical recognition, the short story would lack self-representation to contest its stereotyped

discrimination. If the short story, as an artistic product, is left out of the canonical heritage, then national literature will increasingly be impoverished. National literature must not be an impoverishing filter if the totality of African socio-historical cum cultural possibilities is to be captured. Thus short fiction should not be considered an inconsequential subcategory or appendage of the novel.

#### **4.2. Deconstructing the Zimbabwe literary canon: A generic perspective.**

The discussion has thus far presented literary canon as a debate much more about inclusion and exclusion of particular texts and/ or authors as representative of national literature. However, the discussion of the inclusion/ exclusion matrix is not merely a mindless celebration of difference for its own sake. Neither is the concern for revisiting concepts of literary canon simply a perfunctory appraisal of some kind of monochrome literary homogeneity. The debate about the short story canon engenders vital issues of contemporary relevance in debating African literature. An understanding of the literary canon reveals the underlying problem of the way our literary society is still structured in imperialistic dominance in which the experiences of the minorities as generic types remain lacerated. Therefore, the analysis of the Zimbabwean literary canon requires a much more complex approach that does not end with conservative critics girding themselves to defend the greatness of the novel by developing sub-disciplinary formations meant to exclude the short fiction. Nor does it require wholesale espousal of the hitherto excluded canons as if their inclusion may create their own breakthroughs outside the limits of academic tastes and perception. Davis (2012:64) consents that literary canon is a “consciousness and not just a list of [popular] texts.”

The lack of scholarly consensus with regard to the canonical position of the Zimbabwean short story is consequent upon multifactorial valences of canonicity. The prevailing notion of the novel as the centre of fiction and the short story as margin is built upon a contingent of factors. These interlaced factors operate in a simultaneous and dynamic relationship to such an extent that boundaries between them may not be distinct. Their interconnectedness defies measurement. Since Zimbabwean literature is perceived as a phenomenon anchored in society, understanding these factors depends on socio-historical and cultural context as well

as on institutional powers that legitimate the context. As Davis asserts, any given literary canon exists as a function of interplay between “institutional practices, cultural practices and the (intellectual) need for division and categorisation” (Davis, 2012:72). Therefore, the paradoxical nature of the Zimbabwean short story and the confusion of its canon can best be abetted by examining these factors.

#### **4.2.1. Multifactorial canonical contributors**

The factors contributing to Zimbabwean literary tradition can logically be constructed following Brown’s (2010) taxonomy. Brown identifies and organises the factors into two categories; extrinsic factors situated beyond the literary text and intrinsic properties of the literary work itself. However, Brown warns against the risk of emphasizing one aspect of the classification system over others since it often takes more than one factor for a literary text to ascend to a sanctioned list. Conversely, intrinsic factors may also subject to extrinsic mediation to make sense. Brown (2010:537) pointedly argues that it is worth noting that “what we see as ancillary factors in canon selection may have crucial importance” in describing “aspects of literary works and their reception history.” As the research navigates these factors, it is borne in mind that the classification system is merely arbitrary since the concerned stakeholders; writers, critics and institutions (such as the academe and publishing sector) may not concede the existence of such factors.

##### **4.2.1.1. Extrinsic factors of the Zimbabwean literary canon**

The liminal condition of the short story canon is determined by the degree of its dependence on external institutions of culturally dominant centre. This dependence is a condition of a number of factors of heteronomy (that is forces outside of the short story text itself.) Therefore, the short story indeterminacy is a syndrome of being overruled by external

canonical force. An interview with Wellington Wasosa, a senior lecturer in the Department of African Languages at Great Zimbabwe University, intimates:

There are various reasons for the exclusion of the short story in mainstream Zimbabwean literary canon. This is not a unique situation in Zimbabwe alone but Africa as a whole. Some of the reasons have to do with the writers themselves whilst others have to do with the literary critics and the publishers. Most of the critics (who are also writers in some cases) rarely include short stories in their criticism and this results in the marginal growth of the genre. In the end, the publishers would prefer other genres which are more profitable to deal with.

The import, here, is that the subordination of the short story canon is not only a matter of genre preferment. Issues relating to ideology of the canonising culture, publishing ethos and institutionalisation of writers and critics affect the protocols of the short genre's lack of ramifications for canonical inclusion. A close exegesis of each of the external forces contesting the genre's literary space illuminates the obscenities of a strict canonical straitjacket.

#### **4.2.1.1.1. Perpetuation of colonial literary legacy and inertia to change**

The greatest deterrent to decolonising the literary curriculum lies in the perpetuation of "unequal exchange of the historical legacy of colonialism" (Okolo, 2007:87). Its distinctive feature lies in the subordinating relationship of the West as 'core' and African as 'other' that ultimately constrained definition of African literature. Unfortunately, political independence failed to reverse this most enduring engagement which permeates the intellectual domain. The development of African/ Zimbabwean literature hints at the complexity of the machinery of the colonial enterprise that extends beyond the political chambers to influence artistic sensibilities and intellectual configurations as well. The lasting imprint of perpetuated colonial legacy manifests in the literary assumptions and values ascribed to African literature by European literary tradition. It is befitting to conclude, in Brown's parlance, that Western literary tradition is an "institutionalised device whereby canonical works serve to uphold the value of the powerful, with new groups vying to stake their claim," Brown (2010:538). Thus, colonial education as a "self-perpetuating cultural pillar" (ibid: 538) subtly transmitted its literary legacies to its subjects, a phenomenon that Okunoye (2004:156) denigrates as

“textual attitude.” For Okunoye ‘textual attitude’ is a complex but systematic manufactured identity for non-Europeans that manifests in “the invention, validation and circulation of stereotyped notions which are ... products of popular imaginations and official records of the colonial power,” (ibid: 156). Academics tend to teach what they have been previously taught, hence, “the greater the body of accumulated literary tradition, the greater the inertia” or resistance to change (Brown, 2010:538).

The colonial instruments of conquest of African textuality operated a twofold manifestation within Zimbabwean literary and intellectual realm. On the one hand the Rhodesia Literature Bureau served the purpose of moderating the outlook of indigenous African languages literature and conditioning the presentation of Shona and Ndebele imaginative creative genres. On the other, colonial education presented its African beneficiaries “with the first motivated representation of their [European] collective image” the acquisition of which was designed to initiate apemanship in the subjects (Okunoye, 2004:157). Thus, the ambivalences inherent within the national literature, particularly in English mediated African literature, are much more about the risk of appropriating dominant European literary examples and then, contextualising them to create quasi-nationalistic sensibilities.

Early history of Zimbabwean indigenous African languages literature is bound up with SRLB subtly commissioning colonial legacies that ultimately denigrate African cultural sensibilities. The hostile reaction and indifference towards the short story typifies the recurrent tension between African cultural values and the Bureau’s ostensibly apolitical universal appeal for literary aesthetics. The Bureau claimed that it recommended indigenous languages manuscripts for publication in order to encourage reading and writing in the wake of perceived lack of creative interest among the black populace (Krog, 1979). Yet, in reality the Bureau’s involvement subverted national literature to demonstrate a strange affinity to imperial project of African cultural annihilation. Primorac argues that the Bureau concealed its inbuilt multi-layered censorship mechanisms by projecting an ambiguous literary prize culture.

The Bureau encouraged would-be writers through literary contests and sponsored publication of manuscripts by commercial publishers. Its declared aim was to promote

literacy, create a body of work in African languages, and transform Shona and Ndebele into fully-fledged parts of school curricula (schools became the greatest market for Bureau-sponsored books). At the same time however, it controlled the structure and thematic range of such manuscripts in order to discourage Shona and Ndebele texts that were practically unacceptable to the state. The Bureau's editors encouraged narratives constructed around elaborate but schematic plots dealing with love, crime and family intrigue, (Primorac, 2003:53).

According to Lordwell Manyika, whose long stint with the Literature Bureau stretches from its Rhodesian times until its collapse a decade into independent Zimbabwe, the criteria for winning the competition were determined by choosing the most interesting and topical subject at the time. Prizes went to a winner and two runner-ups for each language. Muwati (2009:48) argues that while the Bureau sponsored competitions were instrumental in quantitative production of African languages fictional works, possibilities exist "that they irredeemably stultified creativity and innovation," which for him are "important attributes in literature." It contributed towards institutionalisation of various forms of censorship - patronage as censorship, self/internalised censorship and direct censorship- whose comprehensive assessment is Chiwome's (2002) preoccupation. Muwati argues that once fictional production is determined by a competition it departs from the age-old function of servicing the people. The ambivalence of short story marginality could be an effect of writers paying homage to the terms and conditions of the legitimating sponsor who cherished long narrative as "good literature" (Krog 1979:1). Commenting on the Bureau's emphasis on "good literature" Muwati argues that the adjective 'good' is relative because its reference is not inclusive of all people at all times. He writes:

It either is good because it facilitates the entrenchment of oppression and obnoxious fear of freedom. It can be good because it whets a people's consciousness and increase their ability to be critical and creative thereby enjoining the practice of freedom. At the same time, there is also the danger of literature being used as a propaganda tool. The emphasis on good literature was itself one of the subtle mechanisms of patronising creativity. Usually such patronage served the interests of the reasons for the setting up of the (Rhodesia) literature Bureau than the writers were the producers of the work, (Muwati, 2009:45)

It can, therefore, be adduced that the exclusion of the short story was deliberate. The writers' creative options were truncated as they strove for political correctness. The novel that had been set as the standard restricted prospects of diversification offered through experimenting with short narrative. For Muwati as for Chiwome, literary diversification is the hallmark of creativity.

Chiwome delves at lengthy into the underhand activities of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau in supervising the production, dissemination and consumption of indigenous African languages literature. He observes that the Bureau that lasted a decade after independence fell for a greater part under the “the virulent and much abhorred Native Affairs Department” (Chiwome, 2012:276). The Ministry of Information in which the Bureau was situated “envisaged the novel as a vehicle of colonial values,” (ibid; 296). Inevitably, post-independence national literature conformed to trends set by the Bureau and to-date it still continues to lend itself to use by the elite.

Writers were nurtured in state and church schools which acted as Western cultural greenhouses. The colonial writers’ isolation from the rest of the African and African Diasporan publishing world increased with the imposition of economic sanctions in Rhodesia in 1965. Sanctions affected book production in the nascent small scale text-book oriented publishing industry. This isolation denied writers suitable models for producing high quality literature, (Chiwome, 2012:257).

The potency of the SRLB’s hegemony was not absolute domination but a subtle process that worked by drawing indigenous African languages artists in and discouraging black writings in English. The Bureau’s subtle machinations had the overall effect of constructing an effective neurotic form of self-identification with the hegemonic system. Williams (1997:118) describes this kind of forced internalisation as “a specific internalised socialisation expected to be positive but which, if that is not possible, will set on a [stoic] recognition of the inevitable and the necessary.” An interview with Mungoshi illuminates how the Bureau’s subtleties operated:

At the end of 1974, after I’d completed *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, I sent it to the Literature Bureau, which was then the only institution where you could have books published in the local languages, Ndebele and Shona. It was a government institution under the Ministry of Information and they didn’t publish in English. The government then felt that Africans didn’t know enough English to write anything worth looking at. So most of what we wrote was in our languages and the Literature Bureau acted as a kind of literary agent for most of us. They would scout for manuscripts, look at them and give recommendations. They didn’t have their own publishing house. They would recommend a book to an established publishing house with a promise that if the book wasn’t sold out in three years, they would buy the remainder. So the publisher didn’t feel they were risking anything. Otherwise we couldn’t publish anything in Rhodesia, (Mungoshi’s interview in Khorana, 1998:38).

Black writing in English had to “turn to British or American publishers to have their books printed” (Riemenschneider, 1989:402). Even then, such exotic literary productions risked being banned in their own country by the heft arm of the censor board. Mungoshi’s 1972

collection of short stories, *Coming of the Dry Season*, was banned because of its final story, 'Accident' that relates the fate of a nameless African man overrun by Whiteman's car. The unmoved 'Boer' driver, whose indifference suggests that the police/ or the law would not prosecute him, is unperturbed by the outrageous African passers-by. The Rhodesian Literature Bureau's former director, Walter Krog, banned the book fearing that it would "stir hatred and ill feeling in the African minds against Europeans and that the circulation of this book was likely to harm relations between the Whites and Black sections of the public" (Alden, 1994:111). The then University of Rhodesia's English Department unsuccessfully lobbied a counter-attack against the ban contesting that the book was a "serious work of literature" which aims at educating the African readers into a "balanced and discriminating moral awareness of the issues raised," (ibid: 112). Drawing upon the value of "new critical theory" the department proved to the Censor Board, the Bureau, that the white society was safe. However, Krog, who perceived the African reader as naïvely indiscriminating and susceptible to influence, could not uplift the ban until 1978. Suspicious that the targeted black readership extended beyond university students, Krog chastises:

The Board is aware that the African is still tremendously influenced by the written word and many cannot distinguish between fact and fiction... the board is of the opinion that this book is likely to have a most unfortunate effect on the minds of a substantial number of African readers and to imbue them with anti-European ideas. (Alden, 1994:111)

The Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, as Censor Board, used its authority to assert its imperialist '*self*' interests, apply subtle but oppressive measures to control the *othered* African writings and to engender a consensus necessary for its notion of civility. The Board covered the breaches caused by the colonial master's conflicting historical and cultural interests by propagating a quasi-African literary outlook. Such conflicted neurosis pervades the post-independence academics' determination of what the standard fictional curricular should decree.

In an interview, Muwati suggests that the Rhodesia Literature Bureau's "stupendous preference for the novel ... is what one finds in abundance on Zimbabwe's literary cartography." He explains:

Rather the short story has not been a favourite of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. Writers preferred to write novels so that these would be prescribed as set books. For that reason, the culture of the short story has almost been non-existent in Shona



literature. Because the Bureau was dominant and also partnered with other publishing units such as College press, Longman and ZPH, it had control over form and genre.

An interview with Chigidi expressed the same sentiments as Muwati in respect of the SRLB's short story aversion.

I think before independence the canonisation of literature by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau was responsible for the exclusion, not decline really, of the short story. There is no evidence to show that there was any deliberate effort to develop this genre. However, the same cannot be said of the post-independence era where the Literature Bureau, note change of nomenclature, went out of its way to encourage authors to write short stories by organising short story-writing competitions. Also after independence the Women Writers of Zimbabwe organised and published short stories about women's experiences during the liberation war. No such efforts by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau are discernible.

Since the SRLB's policies were ideological and cultural propaganda it became inextricably ideological to repel the Bureau's colonial idiosyncrasies soon after independence. Writing became a retaliatory as authors sought to re-assert and re-enforce their African political and cultural base albeit on a colonial stencil. According to Kahari (1990) between 1956 and 1980, the Rhodesia Literature Bureau had, under its jurisdiction, supervised the production of one hundred and twelve, (112) works of Shona, sixty eight, (68) Ndebele and twenty-two, (22) English fictional works. Out of these, only Kabweza's edited *Ndakatongwa Nenyika Mbiri*, published by Mambo Press in 1976, is the only meaningful Shona short story collection to appear. However, Kabweza's collection was never accorded the status of serious art worth circulating as a set book in schools then. This collection and a few other literary creations that had survived screening had never been co-opted in school curricular on the basis of their artistic non-alignment with the Bureau's colonially permissible dictum. Ndebele records no short story at all in its pre-independence publications. The Bureau undervalued short story genre as an insignificant preserve of children's literature. Stringer, (1987: xxii) writes:

The Literature Bureau began producing simple booklets in Shona and Ndebele for children in the late 1950s and 1960s. They were simply stapled foolscap pages of eight, twelve and sixteen pages in length ... selling for 5c, 10c and 15c, respectively. These were extremely popular with children and were followed up with story booklets ... often illustrated with black and white line drawings. They were between twenty-four and thirty pages in length and sold between 15c and 30c.

The SOAS Library Catalogue, a constituent college of the University of London and the African Pamphlet Collection of Indiana University, retain some of the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau's children's booklets that Stringer alludes to. Among them are; Sithole's

*Mataka Kumafuro* (1975), Madongorere's *Moto Muziso* (1976), Mushinyi's *N'anga inobata Mai* (1976), Matsikiti's *Dundundu Ipfinbi* (1978), Moyo's *Nhamo Ine Nharo* (1978), Chiganga's *Nherera inozvichengeta* (1978), Masheka's *Ingwe neMbabvha* (1978), Mauchaza's *Ushingi HwaGochwa* (1979) and *Panomera Muswe Panonyeredza* (1979). These textbooks, (all shy of thirty pages) had no great impact on Shona literature whose definition had come to resemble what Mootz (1994:977) described as "pathological neophiliacs." This is a form of neurosis in which writers demonstrate an affinity to embrace the new and latest trends without careful engagement or independent critical thinking. The novel, for want of its exoticism, was embraced as a newfound imaginative expression. These short stories ordinarily appeared as a genre of the folk and would easily be referenced as a 'faithful' or straightforward account of the familiar, hence associated with children. Its presumed prosaic nature rooted in African folkloric story-telling tradition was perceived as lacking the strangeness of the novel. It is ironic that, rooted in the people's culture, this genre became an unfortunate victim of the presence of the hegemonic novel of European heritage.

It was part of the colonial project to associate childishness with primitiveness in order to propagate a form of epistemological imperialism that fixed African knowledge systems as the invisible 'other.' This process of misrepresentation involved misreading the African cultural artefacts and deliberately re-producing the recurrent image of the African as childish, lazy, bestial, backward, lustful and stupid. The Bureau re-cycled the stereotyped image of great versus inferior through metaphorical representation of novel as superior and short story as child-play in order to construct a racialised African identity. The prestigious novel accorded African writers the privilege to narrate their experience as imaginative writing much better than short fiction.

The bottom-line is that SRLB never co-opted the short story as an alternative curriculum option. The matrices would never converge since the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, that was inceptioned in 1954 to encourage reading and writing in Shona and IsiNdebele, had African cultural annihilation as its chief obligation. As such, in its struggle to maintain cultural inequity the Bureau did not index the short story among other cultural artefacts as official canon. The Bureau condemned African oral narratives, such as songs, epics, myths, legends and folktales or short stories to an aborted inventory. The peripheral existence of the genre is "only part of the story since information on poetry, plays, and short stories" (Kahari,

1990:2) beaming from the radio and television broadcasts and the local newspapers is not available. Kahari cites Dambaza's invisibility as an example. He started writing "as early as 1946," but his "poetic genius never had been... published," (ibid: 4).

Whilst the Rhodesia Literature Bureau commissioned a subtly restrictive literary tradition that became the natural face of indigenous African languages literary canon, the growth of Zimbabwean literature in English is a direct influence of British colonial education on African literature. Since pioneering literature written in English by blacks was published outside the country, mainly by Heinemann African Writers Series, a Kenyan subsidiary of metropolitan Heinemann in London, its outlook was esoteric. The end of formal colonialism in most African countries, particularly in East and West Africa coincided with the inception of African literature as a distinct phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter Two, Makerere Conference of 1962 gave birth to African literature whose most salient feature was decolonisation of the Africa mind (Mukoma waNgugi, 2014.) Ironically, the dependence of African writings in English on active participation of British publishers was a way of rolling back Western imperialism. The African Writers Series, (AWS) was the "cultural arm of a dying colonialism ... seeking the afterlife of the physical empire on the propagation of Englishness" (Mukoma waNgugi, 2014:20).

Although decolonisation (in the context of cultural identity) became an important imperative for African writers and critics, the decolonisation process was not a complete return to pre-colonial Africa. Rather, it implied balancing relationships between European and African heritages into unique African expressions. The need by Makerere generation of African writers and critics to create autonomous African literature met a flawed background. As discussed in Chapter Two, their debates over cultural identity and language of mediation of Africa literature inclined towards consenting that African aesthetics could best be conveyed in English via the form of a novel. Despite being critical of colonialism and seeking to break ties with European autonomous canons, African writings in English "reflect the dual legacy of European cultures and pre-colonial African modes of expression" (Mwangi, 2015:1). Thus these two polemical centres in the creation of African literature worked on "Manichean ever-present contradictions" that Mukoma waNgugi explicitly exposes. He argues that writers

often circumvented a return to the source by considering imposed British cultural alternatives.

European literature was the centre ... the starting point of African students embarking on the literary journey, whether writer or critic. African literature being borne off an imagination formed by (both) colonial and anti-colonial struggles worked on Manichean ever-present contradictions, (Mukoma waNgugi, 2014:28).

The same attitude that informed the growth of English literature as superior to African languages literature also informs the idea that the novel is capable of conveying serious literary, scientific and philosophical discourses much better than the short story, whose presumed thin plot, superficial characterisation and poor narrative structure is considered suspect. Unfortunately, this attitude is an “intentionally shaping version of the (European) past and pre-shaped present ... powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition” (Williams, 1977:115). It is inevitably corrosive of African cultural and meaning-making practices yet conceals the fact of its selectivity. This deliberate negation of the active process of Africanhood and African consciousness ratifies the present outlook of Zimbabwean literature. The former master’s intrinsic interest in African creativity indicates that literature is an influential colonial tool of “probing the collective outlook of Europe on Africa,” (Okunoye, op cit: 161). The African novel became the most effective colonial instrument of mentally subjugating African intellect. Okunoye considers literature of the Empire as the imperialist’s *modus operandi* for enforcing compliance with its enduring colonial legacy. The inordinate ambition and defined objective of the colonial education in Africa is, according to Okunoye (2004:161) the “erasure of Africanness and the ultimate cultural transformation of the African through the ennobling values of Europe.”

The culmination of the colonial project on African intellectualism is the reproduction of quasi-African sensibilities as national literature. Thus African literature’s record disinterest and inertia towards short fiction is a function of predisposed continuity of colonial legacy perpetuated through the machinery of colonial enterprise. The deliberate inclusion of English classics such as of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy within African literary canons functions to propagate Western cultural images which the African supposedly legitimates as ‘cultural capital.’ Irele (1996:1) admits that the hegemonic presence of these European classics had a negative influence on African intellectualism:

In case of Shakespeare, there is perhaps some irony to the fact that the sustained effort to regulate African minds was the initial condition for his dominance as a literary reference placing him at the centre of a constellation formed by other 'canonical writers such as Jane Austen, George Elliot, Charles Dickens and the English Romantic poets.

For instance, the deployment of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in the curriculum of African literature is deliberate act of distorting African identity, standardising stereotyped image of Africa as 'dark continent' and socialising Africans to accept Europe as index of literacy and enlightenment . The act derives from

...the fact that colonial education as an instrument of power could easily facilitate the dissemination of certain notions about the colonised and consequently modify their self-esteem and self-definition, (Okunoye, 2004:161).

The reality of mental conquest of African intellect manifests in the subordination of the African short story rooted in Africultural tradition of story-telling in favour of "narratives constructed around elaborate but schematic plots (Primorac, 2003:53). Early indigenous intellectual elite bred by the colonial education system projected European worldview as the ideal and permanent literary theatre for recreating African literary identity. The Bureau's editorial policies were precise about apolitical novel as idyllic vehicle of creative expression and target for African cultural disintegration. Thus, in seeking conformity with the Bureau's Europhile canonist principles, the writers abandoned the short narrative form embedded in their folkloric story-telling tradition in favour of the elitist novel. The African short story's presumed anachronistic nature was not considered to be as protean as the novel whose elitism resembled Western classics. Lindfors (1995:5) derides this as the most ridiculous manifestation of the continued veneration of the irrelevant colonial legacy.

Instead of making use of local literary resources to create something meaningful and relevant to African, [the African intellectuals] turn their eyes towards English, import ponderous verbal artefacts from that remote and dying culture and try to set them up as monuments worthy of universal veneration. Some of these artefacts are genuine antiquities from Elizabethan times, others are curious and shop-worn souvenirs that have no more validity ... The student learns not to read but to decipher these strange foreign texts, which begin to assume the importance of Holy-writ and are studied every bit as religiously. The result is a form of intellectual colonialism which accepts the basic premise that Africa needs the civilising influence of Europe.

However, the Ministry of Education's attempts to decolonise the curricular, soon after independence, predicated on the dire need to reverse colonial hegemony in education. The effort saw the Ministry of Education aborting its collaboration with University of Cambridge

Local Examination Syndicate as a national secondary school examination body. The transition resulted in the inception of Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council, (ZIMSEC) which took over reign in 1995. The Ministry of Education responded positively to Ngugi's (1988) exigency of decolonising the education system by nullifying its collaboration with the Cambridge international examination body, replacing 'English literature' with 'Literature in English' to accommodate works drawn from the African, African American and the Caribbean and enforcing Shona and IsiNdebele as media of instruction for the respective languages literature.

While these transformations demonstrate a commitment to post-independence decolonisation project, the short story area escaped notice. The continuing institutional disdain of the short story genre is an instance of such lapse. Thus relegation of the genre to the colonially created echelons of children's literature and/or apprenticeship of literary appreciation and creativity makes it appear as 'small literature.' The disappointing picture of the orientation of the Zimbabwean literary canon is a fact of the disintegration of the short story from the African cultural core. An informed comprehension of this factor offers a progressive gauge for the re-appraisal of the short fiction as a grant cultural project of decolonising the literature curriculum. Okunoye (2004) argues that the constellation of African literature as a site for incredible subordination of the African knowledge industry should be a matter of scholarly interest in Afrocentric deliberations.

A synopsis of perpetuation of colonial legacy and inertia, as factors of canonicity is that the undergrowth of the short story genre results from colonial mistrust of the supposedly marginal oral art forms to potentially convey serious literature in scientific and philosophical terms. It is a collision course where (neo-) colonial interests converge with African writers and critics' inertia to allow literature to break new grounds.

#### **4.2.1.1.2. Institutional consecration and recognition**

Brown (2010) ties canonical valuation to the perception that literary texts have merit. Davis (2012) stresses that a literary text functions differently depending on the social, artistic and economic context. As a construct of social identity, the text achieves what Davis, (2012:63)

regards as “marker of symbolic capital” (equivalent of Guillory’s (1993) “cultural capital,”) that functions as a sign of shared socio-historical and cultural tradition. Davis and Guillory concur that a literary text with wide dissemination cedes consecration in academe as much as in socio-cultural context. Similarly, Brown (2010:539) avers that a literary text achieves canonical reception by gaining scholarly attention.

Recognition by scholars is the pressure point for opening the pedagogical canon because it embodies and engenders critical esteem. Notice by scholars amounts to an official testament to qualify. Besides allowing entry, scholarly notice is presumed to play a role in keeping works and authors in the canon corral.

For Brown, acceptance or non-acceptance of all literary texts into the canon is a condition of scholarly attitudinal practice. This view is shared by Mapara, who, in an interview with the researcher, posits that the exclusion of the short fictional genre is not entirely consequent upon the Rhodesia Literature Bureau’s indeterminacy. He argues that it has much to do with constellation of universities as learning institutions mandated to institute pedagogic course outlines. Mapara argues that the Rhodesia Literature Bureau “was set up to develop literature of least ideological resistance. It does not say novel. Its reference is to literature.” To further exonerate the Bureau from accusation of narrowed short story focus Mapara adds:

As far back as 1959, the first Shona poetry anthology was published, that is three years after the first Shona novel, *Feso* (Solomon Mutswairo). The first play was to come in 1969, and the first short story anthologies *Ndakatongwa Nenyika Mbiri* and *Mvengemvenge* were to come later in 1976 and all were published by Mambo Press [under the auspices of the Bureau].

Mapara’s contention is that although the Rhodesia Literature Bureau maintained a dubious role in the production of national literature it may not be held responsible for all of the pitfalls of Zimbabwean national literature. He maintains that institutional practices and academics’ curricular tastes imbue the liminal condition of the short story:

So the exclusion of the short story from the Zimbabwean literary canon to me has to do more with the education curriculum that had selectors of literary set texts who ignored the short story. It was recently that short stories in Shona have been prescribed at both O and A level, I think starting in the 1990s with *Ndakatongwa Nenyika Mbiri* and later *Masimba*.

Muwati also accedes to the view that the Zimbabwean literary canon is sanctioned by the community of the academe. Responding in an interview Muwati he says:

The curriculum in universities is to a large extent the prerogative of the academics. If the academic concerned has a skewed and toxic orientation then the quality of change leaves a lot to be desired.

Muwati reiterates what Chiwome and Mguni (2012) echo in postulating that certain literary works get the support of educational institution through their prescription for study in schools, colleges and universities, while others do not. They postulate that the study of African literature, therefore, involves analysing institutionalised ways of looking at reality. For them, learning institutions present literary canon as a site of struggle where recycled colonial images of domination are reproduced.

Through literature reality can be reorganised to suit the interest of those in power. In the context of the former colony like Zimbabwe, literature can be viewed as a site of struggle... Writers can either represent powers that oppress the masses or write from below in order to bring the people living in the margins closer to the centre, (Chiwome and Mguni, 2012:3).

One discerns from Chiwome and Mguni that writers concentrate on writing novels because the school and universities as the consecrating centres, not only prioritise the novel but prescribes it ahead of the short story. However, it is ironic that writers prefer not to “write from below,” to bring grassroots genres close to the centre. If they did they could have preferred the inferior short fiction in order to bring its marginality “closer to the centre.”

Lauter (1983) considers professionalisation of the teaching of literature as well as development of literary theories as instrumental factors influencing institutional recognition of certain texts over others. He holds that professional specialisation contributes to the institutionalisation of academic reading choices. What had been the function of the museum, art galleries, publishing houses, literary clubs and magazines has become the purview of the classroom at the discretion of the professors. The lecturers determine the criteria for selecting texts for study. Texts exist within a given canon because they were placed there through “institutional practices, cultural practices and the human need for division and categorisation” (Davis, 2012:72).

Muwati, a professor domiciled in UZ department of African Languages and Literature, responded in an interview that the idea of literary canon in African languages literature is not



a case of form or genre preferment. The concern over difference or sameness of form is subsidiary to articulation of socio-historical and cultural matters. Fiction is studied generically. The course that covers the generality of fictional discourses is simply called 'The Novel' and is offered to first and third year undergraduates. A short story is integrated and analysed in terms of the novel. Whether the two are similar or different in terms of form is not a matter of concern. The department offers no course for creative writing, unlike in English Department. Muwati comments:

What is vital is not the genre or medium. Rather, it is the sensibility and aesthetic commitment and orientation of the writer. *Masimba*, for example, advances a thoroughly westernised and divisive sensibility on gender or male-female relations.

He observes that African consciousness, the deepest felt definition of Africanness, precludes Western literary values of genresization and massification of art. Rather, modern African literature, according to Muwati, should celebrate:

...sensibility of the writer, potential for consciousness building, potential for re-Africanisation of consciousness as well as possibilities for understanding the economic, social and political dynamics in the nation.

The UZ approach to fiction permeates almost all local universities. For instance, a Midlands State University lecturer acknowledges the role of professors and fellow lecturers in shaping the curriculum course. He argues that the concerned lecturer decides what to study in consultation with ZIMCHE. He says he considers the content over form to determine a course of study.

Rather than celebrate the number of publications there is critical need to concentrate on quality as determined by Zimbabwe's lived and liveable experiences. ... Celebrating the upsurge of publications without an intense interest in content may be self-defeating because the culture and agenda carried by some short stories may not be uniquely African.

This importation is consequent upon theoretical foundations the departments of African languages literature extol to support their national literary canon. The Afrocentric theoretical foundation upon which African languages literature is predicated cherishes African consciousness as a construct for firm socio-historical and cultural persuasions and articulation of African intellectual and symbolic cohesive identity, (Nobles 2015). For Nobles consciousness is relative to African people's literature:

(Consciousness is), in effect, a construct that represents the ability of human beings to know, perceive, understand and be aware of *self* in relation to *self* and all *else*... it allows African people to reflect, respond, project and create from, before and beyond the time of one's experience. Consciousness allows for the retention of [African] sensibilities that interpret and give meaning to contemporary experiences, (Nobles: 2015:45-6).

Thus, as African cultural continuity, consciousness dispels notions of form in literature. The concept of 'form' becomes 'theory' only in Eurocentric formalist literary criticism which mainstream Afrocentricity frowns at. As such, conception of African fiction in terms of 'form' would betray the view that Afrocentricity is a movement away from the representation of the literary object as Kantian aesthetic pleasure value centred. It destroys the necessity of an African-centred theory for finding an answer to the question of the definition of African literature. The aesthetics of sameness and/ or difference between the novel and short story forms suggests an inclination towards mechanical formalist paradigms of Western aestheticism.

Be that as it may, the complex location of the short story within indigenous African languages literature transcends the mere question of 'form.' The negative literary provenance of the short story canon presages power of the legitimating institutional context. It reveals the power dynamics resident in the rise of professoriate and institutionalism. As Lauter (1983:445) adjudges, Black intellectuals face a peculiar "colour line [prejudice] that professionalism did nothing to dispel. The short story abjection chronicles how "institutionalisation of literature as an academically acceptable discipline" was influenced by "the rise of professoriate as a result of the professionalisation of learning" (D'hean 2011:26). The proliferation of the novel in innumerable excess of short creative writing, (during the pre-colonial and post-independence transitional phase, 1956 and 1990) reproduced a critical scenario in which the value of the short story disappeared among these piles as "hidden texts" due to the disabling and invisible context of an avalanche of indigenous African languages literature (Ede, 2013:180). Ede conceptualises invisibility as,

...disarticulating local condition of production or dissemination – trans-historical, technical editorial, technological, cultural, institutional, genre-specific conceptual and paradigmatic which contributes to ... marginalisation of the African text as hidden, (ibid: 180).

For Ede, invisibility re-inscribes the peripheral short story as symbolising the Western “aesthetic economy of waste” (ibid: 181) in which the plenitude of novel reproduces a parasitical canonical centre that colonises the short story abjection as normal. The opportunistic novel canon

...salvages material of readable quality for its own self-constitution. This necessitates the complete excretion of other works of greater merit but which do not conform to the centre’s ideological requirements, (ibid: 181).

The regression in standards is further aggravated when an institution, as the historically subordinating centre, consecrates a novel whose only merit might be its subject-matter rather than literary quality. The lapse reveals a deplorable form of neurosis in which African socio-historical processes continue to be analysed as isolated stereotypical events in the lives of the unanchored people.

Literary texts have acceded to canonical ascendancy due to periodisation of literary studies. Academic institutions determine their literary canon by allotting texts into conventional histographic organisation of ‘periods’ and ‘themes.’ A respondent insinuates:

Usually it is themes as well as a mix of different periods when texts were published. At times being new is another criterion that is used to determine which book to include among prescribed texts.

The conventional determinants; ‘period’ as historical framework and ‘theme’ as cultural configuration of African literature validates Veit-Wild’s (1993) classification of Zimbabwean literature into threesome generational tiers. Veit-Wild emphasises the distinction between these generations as structurally based on historical periods and thematic patterns each generation exhibited during the course of Zimbabwean history.

...while the first generation believed in social transformation through education and the acquisition of European values, the second generation is basically a generation of cynics while the third generation is liberal and therefore closer to the second in terms of detachment from the African nationalism, (Veit-Wild, 1992:12).

According to Lauter (1983:452) “periodisation of art” has become the “convenient pigeonhole in which to place works in syllabi”. Lauter fosters that historiographic factors of period and theme “shape significantly the ways in which we think about culture emphasizing works that fit a given framework and obscuring those which did not,” (ibid: 445). The

concern for period and theme override the concern for form. Taken in this light, whether fiction is elaborate or brief does not count, hence the novel overwrites short fiction. The text is understood in terms of thematic concerns rather than in terms of compositional techniques.

The exclusion of short story is further heightened by the division of national literature along language units and theoretical foregrounding. The departmentalisation of Zimbabwean literature into African/ indigenous languages literature, on one hand, and English language literature on the other, meant Zimbabwean literature had to be perceived as two appositional fronts. Black professors of literature are separated into their own professional departments so much that the literary canons they charter showcases their respective departments. Critics are products of the departments or faculty units to which they are affiliates. Institutional systems ratify the choice of texts to study. The system is influenced by departmental background and critical position that the academics find persuasive. Davis (2012:72) inscribes:

Critics write within a humanist institution, the university, where truth and authority are privileged over instability and subjectivity. Each viewpoint is dependent on a system of thinking which is privileged by the institution and supported by other practitioners of that system of thinking.

In Anglophone departments where English, French or Portuguese is medium of instruction, African literature parrots European literature that the academics were and still are exposed to. The acquired western lenses of understanding literature are immediately imported into African literature. According to the Wikipedia, free online encyclopaedia, the pioneer University of Zimbabwe, formerly the University of Rhodesia was established in 1952 in special relationship with the University of London, the British establishment. In a bid to preserve relations with imperialist hegemony, the first black university adopted the syllabi of the British establishment. Ngugi (1999) acknowledges the corrupting influence of the British literary hegemony on universities of its creation. He observes that the pioneering African writers and critics, who, more often than not, are lecturers, had recuperated out of the British model of university education they received. They are products of English Departments of literature and their initial aspirations for literature were instigated by admiring the model they read. Alluding to the subtly corrosive nature of British colonial education Okunoye posits:

The colonial educational system did not take the cultural and peculiar situation of their subjects into consideration. It discountenanced their needs and effectively disseminated the European literary heritage and values by ensuring ... that the canon of European literature was adopted within (African) education system, (Okunoye, 2004:165).

Thus colonial education projects a quasi-liberal outlook that does not make overt attempts at invading the African cultural life “beyond the sphere of formal interaction that the school environment and activities of allied agencies like the British Council provided” (ibid: 166). However, its manifestation is a more refined form of indebtedness whereby the Western cultural and aesthetic tastes are recommended as specimen for idyllic literary canon. The commissioning of African literature immediately after independence owed considerable indebtedness to Eurocentric models. Critics within English departments of Zimbabwean literature emphasize the “aesthetic or formal qualities of literature as *belles lettres* (most beautiful, most artistic or imaginative) above whatever historical interests,” (Lauter, 1983:446). Their analysis of African literature emphasise both form and content, (theme) to appreciate aesthetic values of the text. The African novel is studied as unique literary type that embodies characteristics peculiarly its own. Themes embodied are explored in terms of cultural identity, language and usefulness of ‘black’ aesthetics. Williams in Wicombe (2001:159) remarks that the material aspect of the production of a creative text links the pragmatics of transmission with form:

For a social theory of literature, the problem of form is a problem of the relations between social modes and individual projects. For a social and historical theory based on the materiality of language and the related materiality of cultural production, it is a problem of the description of variable relations within specific material practices. Thus a social theory can show that form is inevitably a relationship.

This idea of African literature in Anglophone departments inclines towards representing literary ‘form’ as aesthetically value laden, a position radical Afrocentric literary critics do not content with. Left-wing Africanists, such as Chinweizu, Ngugi, Achebe and Chiwome contend that African literature can only be conceived in terms of its content, that is, its socio-historical and cultural appeal, which, of necessity, must leave out the old-age pleasure, sublime and beauty effects of Kantian aesthetic value in literature (Wenzel, 2005).

Accordingly, the short story, a formulaic variant of narrative, is accepted as a genre of lower status to the novel, the treasure-house of fiction. The marginal recognition of short fiction

reflects an underlying hierarchical structure permeating dominant imperialist pedagogies of Anglophonic African literature. The subordination of the genre recycles cultural lowliness and dependence that African literature is subjected to as long as English, French or Portuguese literatures are “figured as the metropolitan model,” (Glesener, 2013). The local literary politics in the production of a nation-bound canon at the prelude of independence, therefore, became an ideological department in which the academe set objective standards by which the presumed mundane or works of lesser literary value would be separate from the standard masterpieces. Thus, in a bid to present a sustained critique of the modern African writing with a “view to expose its immersion in European traditions” the intellectual community failed to scrutinise their literature curriculum and the effect of institutionalisation of teaching of literature. As a result, the short story was marginalised as patronised craft of the glamorous Europhile novel.

In as much as literature is a strong force for socio-cultural dynamism, its canon might become a centrally organised conspiracy to perpetuate the dominant institutions’ cultural tastes, especially if the lines of demarcation are not enunciated at the level of effect. The present short story debate reflects the latest trends in Zimbabwean literary studies in which institutionalised cultures are at the heart of pedagogical and canonical practices. Within the academy, canon is limited to the academics anxiety for influence that subsists within the “boundaries of held current institutional beliefs and criticism,” (Reaves and Gibson, 2013:9). In the same way as the colonial literature canonised the novel ahead of short story, the criteria for determining a new literary canon within academe of the newly independent state have become canonical too. The entire process has become profoundly circular. The subordinate relationship of the West as centre and Africa as the periphery recreates the Africa novel as core and the short story as marginal within an interplay of interests that sustains the circle. Altieri (1983:40) argues that, “Those whose specific beliefs place them in many respects within the competing circles may still share wider principles.” Literary canonical values are, therefore sectarian, revealing deep affiliations with more enduring cultural values. Kermode suggests that literary canon is a function and valuable feature of institutionalised education that exposes a range of idealised attitudes. Kermode’s conclusion reverberates with Brown’s assertion of literary canon as the prerogative of intellectuals in academe, either as individuals or groups. For Brown (2010:540) intellectuals within a faculty of an academic unit represent

a “multi-dimensional lattice work of symbolic value” for theorising institutional and cultural superstructures of resident canon. Regardless of its estimated socio-historical and cultural importance, nothing can be done until canon-makers adopt institutional measures to ensure official recognition of the short story.

#### **4.2.1.1.3 Publishing politics: Marketing and Literary prizes**

Brown considers politics of publication as one of the main factors for the consecration (or lack, thereof) of texts within canonical formations. The dialectics of publication, marketing and literary prizes crystalize all discussed factors as the most crucial canon-forming mechanism. The influence of publishing ethos and literary prizes on African literary production traces back to the 1926 International Institute of African Language and Culture, (IIALC) whose transformation, over the years, has resulted in change of its nomenclature to International African Institute, (IAI) based in London (Whitehead, 2003). Bush and Ducournau (2015) consent that IIALC encouraged African indigenous writing through rewarding the best book written by an African in own languages. The IIALC gave birth to African Literature Bureaux of which the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau is one. The incentives were coterminous with adherence to the prescriptive criteria of length, genre, style and subject matter. Bush and Ducournau further assert that the subject matter should be sufficiently general to interest many readers and enable sales. The novel was the ideal genre whose fresh, lively and interesting style was understood to have a chance for a prize.

According to Brown (2010) in publishing as in any business, marketing and literary prizes are inseparable aspects of enhanced promotion and distribution of the literary text. As commercial heritage, the literary text has a commodity function since it is a material product of the publisher as much as it is of the artist. As Davis puts it:

For its author the text is pre-eminently a creative product. Whether that author has written the text within a well-defined generic tradition or as a counter-canonical reaction to the tradition, the text is valued as artistic commodity set apart from the social and economic values, (Davis, 2012:63).

Economic capital comes into play in the book market and distribution by publishers as well as business houses seeking to make profit. The marketplace redirects the literary product to certain sections of the public often “with positive reviewers quoted in advertisements and back blurbs,” (ibid: 64) and other media such as film and television adaptations used to boost sales.

However, the literary canon may not be defined by bestsellers since popularity does not necessarily match canonical status. As discussed before, canon is characterised by a consciousness, African or otherwise, that the writer displays. Usually, literary canon is based on ‘symbolic’ or ‘cultural’ capital rather than economic value. Conversely, the texts that sell well to the masses generally afford less symbolic capital. Davis argues that by appealing to symbolic capital and non-monetary appreciation of the text the intellectuals defend literature from becoming a product of primary economic status. Yet for publishers and artists alike, it is “economic bad faith for interests in profits to be disavowed ... in favour of symbolic capital identified with prestige and the power” to consecrate texts as canonical (Davis, 2012:64).

Grabovszki (1999) observes that the regional densities of literary publishing industry imply that circulation of literature depends on their existence, function and policies of publishers. The Zimbabwe publishing industry reflects a threesome generational phase, each exhibiting its peculiarly strange relationship with the short story genre. The pre-1980 or colonial era reflects a settler-colonial ideology and its attendant socio-cultural polarisation of the Western and African worldviews along racial lines. The 1980s to late 1990s mark the transitional phase in publication whereby the revolutionary fervour of the emergent Black Nationalist regimented its endogenous publication policies. The third phase is the present post-transitional period beyond 2000 whose uncertainties and ingenuity open up endless frontiers in supranational spaces.

#### **4.2.1.1.3.1. Publishing during the pre-1980 colonial dispensation**

The publishing ethos of the pre-independence era was to “promote European cultural standards while denigrating African cultural and political agitation as the nemesis of Western civilisation and Christianity” (Mukasa, 2003:172). During an interview, Mungoshi singles out



the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau as the sole colonial non-commercial institution whose function influenced the development, distribution and consumption of indigenous African languages literature as economic commodity.

The (Rhodesia) Literature Bureau acted as a kind of literary agent for most of us. (It) would scout for manuscripts, look at them and give recommendations. They didn't have their own publishing house. They would recommend a book to an established publishing house with a promise that if the book wasn't sold out in three years, they would buy the remainder. So the publishers didn't feel they were risking anything, (Schmidt, 1998:38).

Mambo Press, The College Press and Longman Rhodesia with their strong Christian bias and hefty subsidies for partisan indigenous language novels were major publishing outlets for the Bureau. Gambahaya (1998:15) opines that these "missionary owned presses worked in association with the Literature Bureau, a Government Department, to disseminate didactic literature that had a clear bias towards a Western way of life." Thus translations of Biblical excerpts and other forms of publication that extolled religious values influenced literary creativity as the vigour to read and write inspired the newly-literates to relate closely to new forms of existentialism. As literary agent and marketplace, the Bureau in partnership with the publishers commoditised Shona and Ndebele literature by holding annual literary competitions, as Olga pronounces:

In its function as literary agent the Bureau evaluated manuscripts, edited them and sponsored their publication by commercial houses. It also set up retail outlets all over the country, selling books in the indigenous languages. Oddly enough, the largest market for this literature was the school system. The institutions for blacks were the main consumer of the Literature Bureau sponsored books as supplementary reading, (Olga, 2009:34).

The role of the publishing industry, under the tutelage of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau was to stabilise the status-quo by prescribing ethnocentric literature for use in schools. For want of publication, aspiring writers complied with the Bureau/ publishers' sensibilities. The publishing protocols instigated writers' self-effacement of critical issues since the sheer need for being published and prescribed in school reading lists would make them shy away from truthful depiction of crucial matters. As Chiwome elucidates publishing ethos effaced creative potential.

A shift from efforts to link social behaviour with environmental forces came after 1965 when the settlers under Ian Smith made the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. UDI greatly reduced creative freedom in literature and journalism. The introduction of censorship laws, together with the formidable Law and Order

Maintenance Act, which was enacted to safeguard the interests of the minority regime, narrowed the vision of both editors and writers. The Chief Publications Officer, a former official in the native administration department, regularly read the Act to the Bureau editors, who, in turn, never missed an opportunity to remind aspiring writers of the legal limits of their creativity. This era saw the disappearance from bookshelves of the relatively harmless early works by Chitepo and Mutswairo and, inversely, the wider circulation of the ‘politically correct’ works of Chidzero. (Chiwome, 2007:163)

The writers’ conceptualisation of their creative products as textbooks with economic value conditioned their creativity. Inversely, the Bureau turned publishing houses into a textbook producing industry with profiteering, instead of utility as its main objective. Chiwome and Mguni (2012:297) lament the conceptualisation of the literary text as textbook:

Zimbabwean publishing industry is geared towards textbook production. While this makes much business sense it tends to make publishers and writers government clients, a fact that seems to stifle spontaneous creativity.

Since the publishers depended on school-books to sustain their financial enterprises, the purpose of publication of literary works became sheer profit. Incidentally, the Bureau and publishers’ lure of literary prizes and workshops turned literary creativity into eccentric narrative idiolect, the novel. The short story with its African oral-cultural base was almost obliterated from this quasi-national cultural narrative idiolect due to the complexities of values appropriated to the novel as prototype and economic commodity. The school textbook constituted the lasting source of income for publishers. In the fictional arena, the novel opened economic opportunities for both the writer and publisher. The development of the short story was, therefore, held back by either the publishers who would not want to invest in non-marketable short fiction or by the writers themselves, who had realised commercial opportunities the novel would offer irrespective of its ideological predilections.

Technically, during the colonial era, the short story was stifled by lack of professional writers and publishers on one hand and non-(re)transmission of revenue from sales, on the other. Its fate was conditioned by disinterest among the reading community, low purchasing power of the target readership and its non-existence in distribution of ‘serious’ local literature. Thus publishing in Rhodesia amounted to the double-edged inside/outside alienating effect obtaining from literary competitions and their concept of tokenism. The perceived lack of economic value militated against the short story canonical reception.

African writings in English had to turn to Heinemann, African Writers Series, (AWS) for publication. To be published the literary text should qualify to become a set-book and had to be in English (Mukoma waNgugi, 2014). The decision by AWS to publish English novels by African writers only for educational purposes was a practical effect of the colonial cultural machinations to curtail African culture of reading for pleasure. What had initially been a progressive idea for publishing houses across Africa, (in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe) became retrogressive as publishing monopoly had no concerted effort to develop a general readership outside the classroom. Mukoma waNgugi (2014:21) argues that the publishing goal was to have novels become examination set-books which turn to sell well. No market driven need for readers outside the educational system was set. The short story became less popular. As Wastberg (1986:18) avers, short story writers turned to other media because the printing press denied them access. They used the radio, television, newspapers and magazines to disseminate their short writings for public readership. The gulf between canonical novel and the de facto short story canon widened.

#### **4.2.1.1.3.2 Publishing during the transitional period: (1980 to late 1990s)**

The years preceding Zimbabwean independence are characterised by lack of well-established publishing network for the distribution and circulation of the short story. This follows the urgent need for textbooks that confronted the nation at independence. Publishing non-fiction school textbooks became the major preoccupation of the commercial publishers.

Thus, in 1980, there was a huge and urgent need for books, primarily understood to mean a need for textbooks. Longman and College Press were quick to respond to the challenge; Zimbabwe Publishing House was established in 1980 with initial support from donors for publications and staff training; and Academic Books began to publish textbooks under licence in 1984, (Staunton, 1995:1).

With independence, the hitherto colonial publishers switched their allegiance to ruling elite to sustain their operations. They were dependent on government sponsorship for their livelihood. Textbook production meant receiving subsidies “and as long as the per capita grant is not increased, they will remain vulnerable ... the outlook is bleak (Staunton, 1995:3). Publishers encountered problems ranging from inadequate editorial and production staff,

uneven production rates to poor distribution facilities despite subsidised textbook publication and free distribution of the books to schools. Staunton (1995:2) explains:

As foreign exchange was still very short, the quota system for imported books remained in place. Publishers and booksellers applied to government to import textbooks for A-level, college and university students. In 1986 it was estimated that £4m was needed for such imports, but less than a quarter of this was made available. Permission also had to be sought to pay royalties on licensed titles, and this was granted provided that the book was seen as an 'essential' text.

In spite of the rising demand for textbooks, generally books sold less. The reasons ranged from lack of currency, piracy and import restrictions between African nation states. The flow of books was held up by customs regulations. The effect was acute for publishers of fiction. This further exacerbated the chasm between novel and short story.

The change of the nomenclature, 'Rhodesia Literature Bureau' to simply 'Literature Bureau' at independence entailed change of objectives and policies as well to align with new black government policies. The Literature Bureau continued to sponsor indigenous languages creative writing for publication by major commercial publishers, Longman Zimbabwe, College Press, Mambo Press and the newly found Zimbabwe Publishing House, (ZPH). However, a gradual decline in the Bureau's output, from twenty-three publications in 1980 to only two by 1986 indicated that its role as sponsor of indigenous African languages fiction was now redundant, (Stringer, 1987). As publication gained value as economic capital, the commercial publishers received innumerable manuscripts ahead of the Bureau. The piecemeal demise of the Bureau was inevitable despite the workshops and literary competitions it held to "encourage the Shona and Ndebele people to develop writing skills and thus improve the quality of vernacular literature," (Stringer 1987: xvii).

Local publishing concentrated on over-glorification of the liberation war. Chiwome (1996) notes how, from the early 1980s to the mid-1980s, independence was celebrated through euphoric nationalistic triumphalist literature. The novel became the appropriate form for expressing euphoria induced by patriotism borne of mass-mobilisation psychology. The publishers' concerted effort to sponsor production of triumphant novels suggests how creativity growth is determined by competitions.

The excitement over the birth of a new nation created the illusion that the objectives of the revolution had been fulfilled and also that independence had one official definition and one official history. People believed that they were witnessing the creation of a social order which would do away with all forms of discrimination. In fiction, this literature can be said to be represented by Nyawaranda's *Mutunhu Une Mago* (1985), Matsikiti's *Makara Asionane* (1985), and Pesanai's *Gukurahundi* (1985). ...Such literature is part of the larger project of creating national symbols, as it links the heroic Shona past with rhetorical claims about nationalist independence. Thus it legitimizes nationalism as the only correct background for political leadership. None of the works look at the war in a balanced sense, let alone as organized violence, (Chiwome, 2007:166).

In English as in indigenous African languages literature, very few short story collections were compiled during the period of celebratory literature. Short story writing was not taken seriously because it was considered the training workshop of serious novel writing. Despite the avant-garde respite created by independence, most writers continued along the trends established by the outgoing Rhodesia Literature Bureau. Rather than experimenting with new genres and themes which could contribute to national development, some writers wrote novel out of "legends and myths that they could not freely write about before independence ... to help strengthen the people's identification with the new nation," (ibid: 170)

This return to their roots cannot be celebrated uncritically, as focusing on the past deflects attention from the exploration of the present reality and future possibilities. Significantly, those at the grassroots level do not need to be urged to return to the source, as they were never alienated from their culture to the same extent as the educated elite. Besides, it is meaningless to uniformly celebrate culture in a society divided along class lines. To celebrate the past amounts to expressing confidence in the status quo, (Chiwome, 2007:170).

Stringer, (1987) observes a trend whereby publishers of the transitional era concentrated on printing rather than publishing, hence the quantity of short story publication indicated a trickle rather than a flood. The reprints of novels and educational books were necessary to meet demand for books either initially banned by the Rhodesian regime or deemed out of print before independence. Indelibly, lack of inter-state circulation of short fiction network was apparent. After independence, a somewhat belated emergence of nationalist literature was a slow and laborious process, (Zhuwarara, 2001). The qualitative-cum-quantitative limitedness of the literary production coupled by the structural problems of publication and distribution accounted for the sparse presence of the short story. Much of short story publication during the transitional period was the pre-occupation of state controlled and independent newspapers and magazines such as *Kwayedza*, *Moto*, (Fire) and *Parade*. The independent press became a forum for perceived popular issues and normally covered several

issues marginalised by the state-controlled publishing houses. Thus short stories were denigrated as belonging to the entertainment echelon of “soft news” such as sports, music and art associated with popular or mass culture (Chiumbu, 1997). Short stories were, thus, disavowed for their supposedly popular or mass appeal and easy distribution network of unsophisticated and uncritical audience. The transitional period is bound up with the publication of marketable nationalistic literature and marginalisation of the short fiction. The hostile reaction to the short story typifies a recurrent tension between early nationalists’ anti-colonial politics and the ostensibly apolitical and universal matter of SRLB’s Europhile literary aesthetics.

The period of euphoria is succeeded by another period of silence, (or the interregnum, Vambe 2005) which arose from the tendency by nation builders to “curtail debates and suppress opposing views,” (Chiwome and Mguni, 2012:297). The post-colonial state that incepted with the attainment of independence, in 1980, was superimposed on the British capitalistic economic structures characterised by heavy dependence on South Africa following the fifteen years of economic recession caused by 1965 sanctions targeted against the Ian Smith regime, (Mukasa, 2003). The ailing economic climate was exacerbated by the 1990s economic regression necessitated by neo-liberalisation diktats of the Washington Consensus. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007) the 1990 Washington Consensus was an agreement among economists and Wall Street bankers to chart the best means of procuring global economic growth. The major exponents of the charter are the global financial institutions, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, whose headquarters are domiciled in Washington DC. Thus Washington Consensus became a useful description of neo-liberalism; the medium of 1990s neo-imperialist domination of African and other Third World economies by the British and United States, (US) empires. The concept of “unfettered liberalisation of the market force” is deeply embedded in the ideology of the Empire showcased by a persuasive ideological language aimed to make foreign capital attractive to local economies (Ashcroft, et al. 2007:148). The IMF and World Bank one-size-fits-all prescriptive economic policies was mooted in such artificially attractive abstractions as

...fiscal discipline, redirection of public expenditure priorities towards fields offering both high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution... tax reform, ... competitive exchange rates, trade liberalisation, liberalisation of inflows of foreign direct investment (and) privatisation, (Ashcroft, et al. 2007:219).

This list of principles is crafted in highly technically persuasive ideological language that spawns a “philosophical terrain to obfuscate and cement the power of the west,” (ibid: 219). Ironically, instead of promoting growth, the neo-liberal call for economic reform through Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes, (ESAP) created a narrow economic strait-jacket that impoverished not only the publishing industry but the entire Zimbabwean economic system. The publishing industry plunged into a serious economic depression due to ‘open’ market system that reduced its products (educational and fictional texts) into a web of commodities circulating in an exchange of finance capital. Inversely, the neo-liberal concept in which publication existed became a value in itself quite distinct from production, giving birth to what Ngugi (2004:26) calls “capital fundamentalism” in which the operation of the market became an ethic in itself.

Henceforth, the Zimbabwean publishers wrestled with economic challenges, particularly shortage of foreign currency to procure printing equipment as well as challenges of state monopoly over control and ownership. As each publisher established its own circuits of distribution cut off from the rest, publication of literary works become a market-related liability.

Publishing was certainly one of the industries hit hard by the political and economic crisis of years. The small market there had been for books fizzled out because people were more concerned with the nourishment of the belly than with the nourishment of the mind, (Mushakavanhu, 2011:1 web).

The period saw the collapse of most local publishing houses due to weak material and financial means, continued taxation of book producing inputs, narrower market and an encumbering 1990s socio-political and economic meltdown (Stringer, 1987). The decline was phenomenal across Africa. Staunton explains how the Heinemann African Writers Series, (AWS) succumbed to economic pressure of the day:

I was at Heinemann in a part-time capacity. It was during a period when take-over bids were in the air. And not many years later Heinemann were bought by the Pearson group. At the time, I think we all saw various opportunities, for example, the classics of the AWS series becoming part of a special Penguin series. But, as with so many take-overs and buy-outs, the larger and larger conglomerate work to economies of scale. It was not a full-time position, and with the big changes in the air, Heinemann AWS was scaling down. Within a year or two, I think the whole AWS team had moved on to new horizons, (Staunton, 2014: web).

Publishers and private distributors were plagued by lack of foreign currency and hostile political climate to either scale down production or to close down their enterprises. Literary production, therefore, had to wait in the antechambers of politics and deteriorating economy as the industry (as much as the artists) realised the need to survive the catastrophic effects of the ‘open market’ concept as well as ESAP. Retrenchment, unemployment, poverty and disease, (AIDS) were more damning than anticipated. Given the imperatives of economic structural adjustment, the government could not afford to increase the per capita grant for publishers.

Life in Zimbabwe has become progressively more difficult over the last year, and so has publishing. There are few bookshops left in Zimbabwe and those there are often concentrate on stocking set schoolbooks. The number of books that are sold in Zimbabwe has obviously gone down with the economy. When inflation grew to millions of percentage, by the time money from sales in shops reached us, it was not enough to cover the cost of going into the bank to get it. Then came price controls, forcing shops to halve their prices despite rampant inflation. So the shops stopped taking books, and the shelves got emptier and emptier, and many shops closed down, (Morris and Jones, *Mazwi Literary Journal*, web).

The publication of fiction experienced a brief window period as publishers were determined to publish textbooks for which they felt there was a need even though that need did not equal market force (Staunton, 1995). Publication of literary fiction experienced a lull as the “once upon a time ... older companies – Zimbabwe Publishing House, College Press, Mambo Press and Longman – have sadly become names or insist on servicing the textbook market,” (Mushakavanhu, 2011:1 web). Realising the dearth of fiction publication Baobab Book, a private publisher, was formed in 1988. It had three areas of speciality; “children’s literature, i.e. books which are written for children to enjoy; literary fiction of a high standard; plus two or three non-fiction titles a year,” (Staunton, 1995:5). In an interview with Mugadza, Staunton notes:

None of the above would have been possible without a strong textbook list, which was provided by Baobab’s longer established partner, Academic Books. In other words, the textbooks subsidised the general books, as the latter sold in very much lower numbers, (Staunton’s interview with Mugadza, 2014).

What forced Baobab Books to revert to literary fiction was the paradoxical nature of textbook market where they were “told on the one hand that there was a desperate need for non-fiction titles for the university, college and ‘A’ level students; and on the other that there was no market for them; that to publish such books was a sure way to the debtors’ prison,” (Staunton, 1995:6). It created a dilemma for the publisher to invest in the much needed textbooks since



the perceived ready market, (university, colleges and Advanced level schools,) was hard-hit by insufficient capital to purchase the books. Staunton explains that publishing had become a precarious gamble game in which only the sense of responsibility would initiate motivation.

There is certainly a need for good non-fiction in all the tertiary subjects, but imported books, at the current rate of exchange, are priced beyond the reach of most people. The market for such books is tiny, and if we depended for our livelihood on supplying it, we would not survive. However, I consider that we have a moral responsibility to publish non-fiction titles, especially those developed out of research that has been done in Zimbabwe. ... If, on the other hand, you were to develop a relationship with a Zimbabwean publisher and offer them a special run-on price, ways might be found that would benefit everyone (Staunton, 1995:6).

To stay on course Baobab Books published literary fiction, mainly novels. Their long standing partner, Academic Books, still specialised in textbook publication and that kept the two publishers running. The only short story publication to feature under Baobab is Mungoshi's *Walking Still* (1997). The publisher nurtured the impression that the short story genre was a category of children's literature. Staunton alludes to that perception:

We developed a refreshing list of children's literature which included some wonderful folk tales by Charles Mungoshi, *One Day Long Ago*, and *Stories from a Shona Childhood*, and the illustrated folk tales of Margaret Tredgold, but we also encouraged the development of stories which reflected children's contemporary lives, for which the late Stephen Alumenda had a great gift.

Staunton's comment reveals a deeply embedded misconception that the short fiction is synonymous with folktale, an underdeveloped genre of the ordinary rural folk to which children or unsophisticated childish audience would appeal. The category of children's literature would, therefore, initiate children into literary appreciation, a practice that would graduate them into serious novel readers and writers. This further perpetrates the short fiction's subaltern position to the novel.

#### **4.2.1.1.3.3. Publishing in the post-transitional period: Post 2000 Publication.**

The prevailing economic collapse had its devastating impact on the already struggling textbook oriented publishing industry. Baobab Books that had sustained publication of literary fiction eventually succumbed to economic pressure and folded in 1999. However, in

the midst of these economic uncertainties Weaver Press emerged in 1999 to give writers the much needed fill-up and AmaBooks cropped up a year later. The inception of these private publishers coincided with the emergence of a new writing phenomenon, short story writing, that had developed in response to the writers' restless energy and creative fermentation that the international Caine Prize literary support initiated yielding to the contemporary literary renaissance. According to the *Wikipedia*, an online encyclopedia, the Caine Prize for African writing was launched in 2000 as an annual literary prize for writers of African short stories. This literary award aimed at heightening the richness and diversity of African writing to a wider international audience in order to reflect the contemporary development of African storytelling tradition. The first Caine prize was launched in Harare at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, (ZIBF) in 2000. The first award winner was a Sudanese writer, Leila Aboulela, for her short story, "The Museum."

The enduring Zimbabwean economic, political, existential and psychic aberrations attracted the urgency of short story writing. The writers lost the emotional quietude, financial means and publishing outlets to concentrate on the elongated and sustained novel. Reviewing the economic and socio-political climate that consummated to what she calls Zimbabwe's "lost decade" Rodrigues (2011, web) comments:

The earthy colours and ancient striations of the stone carving give more than a hint of the dreams, aspirations and adventures of some of Zimbabwe's most important writers, all to be found within this slim volume. These were the years of violence, inflation and economic collapse, when many fled to the diaspora, seeking new livelihoods and ways to support their siblings and the ageing parents they left behind.

She observes that short stories are important in their placing of Zimbabwe "in a history of events that will determine all our futures, and eventually provide an answer to the question 'where to now?'"

These challenges conditioned the proliferation of short manuscripts as standard material to compete and win literary awards. As Ede (2013:206) observes, "This was to satisfy a hankering by new writers for literary visibility and possibly more publishing outlets." Ede further chronicles that besides economic factors, the consequences of politicization of the literary field, foundational critical generosity of the local academy and new literary prize establishments have a bearing of the potential flow of the new short story writing. The short

story became the preferred genre for international recognition through contacts in the academe, writers' personal representation and representation by agent or publishers to enter their work for international literary prizes. As Ede further notes, some writers try to influence the incorporation of their work into the school culture, nationally and internationally by "courting international agents or publishers of print material and online Journals to get close to the canon-forming process of the centre," (ibid: 210).

In as much as the role of Weaver Press, AmaBooks and a myriad of small or vanity presses that incepted with the innumerable literary prize committees encourage the steep growth of the short story in Zimbabwean literature, it is bound up with ambivalences. Tapureta, founder of Writers International Network Zimbabwe (WIN), is concerned that the overwhelming international recognition of Zimbabwean authors has come at the expense of indigenous African languages as most writers have taken to English language in order to reach a wider international audience. Nostalgically yearning for the days of the Literature Bureau Tapureta echoes:

There is a deep longing for some "paradise lost" in the literary sector; a yearning for those years gone by when titles of Shona and Ndebele novels were hymns for the school-going Zimbabweans, when radio book programmes and mobile libraries, facilitated by the now defunct Literature Bureau, brought people closer to the beauty of their languages and cultures. However, recent calls to revive the Literature Bureau, perhaps re-structured to fit in the modern times, and the official recognition of a number of local languages in the Constitution, are refreshing, yet how much now is to be done remains a massive responsibility and must be spared the theories of procrastination. With emphasis on Ndebele literature, like its counterpart Shona, it has over the years nose-dived as most writers have taken to English language to reach a wider audience, (Tapureta, 2014, *The Herald*, July, 14, 2014).

Speaking in an interview Nyathi, (who dabbles as a writer, cultural activist, historian and owner of Amagugu Publishers which publishes in English and Ndebele) appreciates the role of the Literature Bureau in promoting indigenous African languages literature. He contends that even though writing was somewhat "circumscribed in light of prevailing political opinion many writers cut their teeth during the days of the Literature Bureau," (Nyathi, *The Herald*, July, 14, 2014). Tapureta particularly outcries that the short story form in Shona has lagged behind the poetry and novel. He observes that the contemporary milieu counts only on Chiwome's *Masango Mavi* and Chirere's *Tudikidiki*. Crediting Chiwome and Chirere's effort as worthwhile Tapureta argues:

Thankfully, both books attempt to develop the short story into a reflective and philosophical enterprise. Chiwome and Chirere seem to have benefitted from a full understanding of theory and practice through their work in the academia, (Tapureta, 2015, *The Herald*, April, 29, 2015).

However, as Mlalazi locates, the problem is entrenched in the collapse of local publishing industry. Publication of local languages literature dried up when local publishers shut down due to the economic depression of the recent years. In an interview, Mlalazi intimated that in extreme cases some Shona and Ndebele writers assumed the additional role of self-publisher and distributor in order to escape the stricture of invisibility but later hit a hard rock in terms of marketing. Most of these writers suffer because self-publishing often short-circuits peer reviews and editorial processes and many a time lack the professionalism of the traditional publishers. The publishing inequality and English language bias circumscribing the distribution and valuation of the short fiction results in its marginalization.

Unlike its indigenous African languages counterpart, the African short story in English courts international readership much easily. Its production has become a conglomeration of institutions with distinct site in local universities and publishing units. According to Vambe and Zegeye (2011) nascent publishing outlets such as AmaBooks and Weaver press are local firms of foreign and international conglomerates. They posit that Mambo Press and Weaver Press work closely with African Book Collective (ABC), to market books from Zimbabwe to North America. Vambe and Zegeye (2011:87) also contends that “Weaver Press produces books that are marketed by Prestige Books, whose forte is the distribution of African books within Zimbabwe, elsewhere in Africa and in Europe” to broaden its cliental base. The short story in English has been commoditised at local academic and international marketplaces driven by imperialist profits.

It is copyrighted and budgeted for in publishing houses. The public infrastructure is owned too ... in Africa most publishing is in foreign lands, an appendage of European publishing houses, (Vambe and Zegeye, 2011:75).

The irony is that the imagined readers of short story published by local publishers are in diaspora. That explains why quantitative production of African short story in English is unparalleled in Shona or Ndebele. In a way, the literary space of the contemporary African short story in the real texture of its lived life and history has been taken for granted. The

African value has been transformed by contact with a wide world so much that it becomes African by virtue of marking.

In summation, the politics of publishing, market force and literary prizes had been (and still is) the major factor contributing towards marginalisation of the short story canon. The dialectics of publishing and marketing champions a capitalistic tendency of commodifying the literary text. Literary prize hogs a libertarian appraisal of the creative entrepreneur by instigating a capitalist mentality that rewards creative artistic achievement and punishes failure. Commodification of the literary text prostitutes an artist into becoming a commercial surrogate of the publisher and his prize culture. Thus literary production may not attain its distinctive African socio-cultural and historical character as a result of skewed perception to fit the hand that gives. The long history of prize culture in African literature illuminates the contradictions embedded in canonical structure of recognition and reception of literary texts. In canonical representational terms these structures construct the novel as hegemonic and the short story as subaltern. This centre/ periphery discourse reveals the ambivalent role of prizes in literary judgment. Profit is touted as the major factor for deciding the genre to invest in. Thus prize culture celebrates the capitalist philosophy that perceives literary production as business hence, like all businesses, must be made to pay. In the long run, the short fiction is barred from the mainstream canon for lacking literary prize acclamation and business validation. This creates a complex canon consecrating paradigm in which genre preferment is accelerated. Within the acceleration, the novel gets canonical recognition whilst the short story is shelved as marginalia.

#### **4.2.1.2. Intrinsic factors contributing to Short story marginality**

Intrinsic factors of canonicity relate to the impact of the literary text itself on pedagogical practices. The effectiveness of the text is determined by its place within literary practice as well as the usefulness of its content. Lauter (1991:110) argues:

To some degree, every text inscribes the social ground against which it was created. Therefore, one can argue that literary works arise in the intersection of historical reality with cultural tradition.

Lauter alludes to the argument that works that feature in a canon are valued for their informative content, transmission of cultural history and lived experiences of Africans. These factors present an enduring debate about African people's experiences, politics and ethics as a marginalised race. The debate involves a definition more or less restrictive of African literature. The complex location of the short story canon seems to be a disagreement over representation in terms of utility (of content) and literary space.

The paradoxical nature of the short story canon is sanctioned by its non-recognition (as superior quality) in literary history. Rather than being considered as a genre requiring attention, its place within literary practices has been taken for granted. The age-old contestation of its literary terrain as ancillary is premised on perceived notions of the genre's non-serviceability as vehicle for understanding critical and ideological issues. Brown (2010:542) argues that for a literary work to be featured as canonical, the work must be a "worthy exemplar." It should qualify to be an ideal specimen of the canonist's thesis and perception. The thesis embodies a literary theory which, in turn, underlies the socio-historical and cultural perception of what the canonist cherishes as the definition of literature. In Brown's conception, critical theory symbolises critical and ideological principles of national and cultural identity framed by socio-political ideals. The scholars pander on theories that influence habits of perception and mental conditions that help define critical practice.

Conflicting aesthetic systems came to dominate literary theory. Radical Afrocentric theory emphasises reconstruction of African identity, regeneration of African consciousness and centrality of African culturalism in literary discourses. The idea of centeredness of Africa forecloses consideration of artistic form in fiction. Its selective focus on 'tendencies,' particularly eccentric tendencies of European imperialism came to disparage the idea that African literature conveys artistic mastery. As such literature should guard against mindless celebration of artistic differences in form for its own sake. However, the pitfall of exclusive focus on tendencies lies in stressing the novel as the representative of the entire African narrative discourse. On the other hand, Eurocentric approaches to African literature, especially within English departments, do not yield a positive outcome vis-à-vis the short story canon. Their formalist approaches emphasise upon novel as masterpiece. The short

fiction is appended to the novel. Either way, literary theories remain elitist in denigrating the short fiction.

Zimbabwean literature had been trimmed into fixed Aristotelian literary categories of poetry, novel and drama (play). Kahari (1990:109) concedes, “Since Plato and Aristotle, the tendency has been to order the total literary domain into [these] three overall classes, called simply literary forms or genres.” Fiction was understood exclusively in terms of the novel. According to Magwa, Plato’s (427 -348BC) approach to literature was strictly authoritarian, emphasizing content over form and technical qualities. Hence “any forms of literature that undermined the state were not accepted.” (Magwa, 2006:102). Aristotle (394 -322BC) and Horace (65 -8 BC) argued that literature should be analysed in terms of form in which it is embodied, (Dorsh, 1965). Horace outlined plot, character, diction, thoughts and spectacle as constitutive elements of form, (Horace quoted in Magwa 2006:102).

The valorisation of length as salient feature of the narrative form shapes literary production which ultimately informs the canon. The unsophisticated short form was rare in English classical tradition extolled as the model for which youthful African literature ‘must’ emulate. The short plot was a very rare convention and “to publish a collection of short stories until you had published a novel” was anathema (Wicombe, 2001:159). As such popular informal literary magazines, newspapers and radio or television provided the ready-made outlet of the downgraded short fiction. The assumption being that no serious reader could opt for an author in apprentice. Grandsaigne and Spackey (1984) elaborate:

Critics are even more encouraged in their dismissive attitude by the fact that, in Africa, the genre tends to appear mostly in popular magazines and Sunday papers as well as to serve as means of apprenticeship in creative writing for aspiring writers, earning in consequence the rather disparaging label of beginner’s work, (Grandsaigne and Spackey, 1984:73).

The short story was considered the training ground whereby the confidence acquired through experimentation encouraged writers to engage with more serious fiction, the novel. Wicombe clinches that the short genre was not only prefigured as an expression of innate creativity but as lesson in writing. This form of apprenticeship made its practitioners a constituent of folks who could graduate to potential novel writers. The genre became a specific feature of

American literary production during the nineteenth century under Edgar Allan Poe's critical attention to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, (ibid: 73). Defining the genre as "short prose narrative" Poe enunciated the rules governing its composition and conceded that the study of short story is the "accord between form and substance," (ibid: 74). Citing the restrictions of the convergence of 'form and substance' purveyors of Modern African literature criticised the freedom of the short story's open form. They, therefore, decided to remain wary of the genre either by discarding it completely or relegating it to a secondary position within the fiction field.

#### **4.3. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the complex condition of the short story corpus in schools and collegiate institutions. Perceptibly, the current debate about Zimbabwean literary canon presents a stratagem. In its broadest sense, literary canon which, of necessity, should comprise the entire written corpus, marginalise the short story because of the rarity of its records. Although Zimbabwean national literature is a mixed grill of indigenous African and English languages African critics of both persuasions belittle the canonical value of the short story genre. Two contradictory tendencies mirror the negativity with which short fiction is appreciated within these two language literatures. On the one hand, African writing is motivated by nationalistic racial pride inherent in positive reaffirmation of the African image. Yet, on the other, the model of its inspiration is the nineteenth century Victorian novel whose ascendancy towards realism endorses linear elongated narrative structure as stunning creative success. As Ngugi (1999) concludes, African fiction retains this conservative narrative structure, quite imitative in form, to describe the pertinent concerns of twentieth century Africa.

The research has also shown that critics of African literature written in indigenous African languages, Shona and Ndebele, do not consider literary models, (genres per se,) as necessary for according African literature its innovativeness. They argue that genres may have been pirated from European models out of desperation or pleasure. What validates creativity and



innovativeness is the content and articulation of African aesthetic sensibilities and consciousness. Story-telling (as narrative) is considered an important aspect of the Shona and Ndebele people's social philosophy. As such, the narrative, inextricably entrenched in the folktales, legends, myth, epics and riddles is a pertinent pathway and survival strategy for Africans to come to terms with the vicissitudes of life. While story-telling is central to African livelihood, the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau fashioned the course of story's aesthetics direction and sensibilities. The Shona/ Ndebele novel therefore, is cherished as opening up a superhighway for fictional representation in African Languages. The short story is classified as belonging to the echelons of oral tradition. While traditional genres are kept alive and regarded as sources of creative inspiration, projecting them as transfixed in culture through retelling short stories would be tantamount to romanticising old tales. Denigration of short fiction in African languages literature also goes with inferiority complex of a people socialised to internalise Western cultural ideals. Thus African writers' inherited anxiety for African image representation skewed their creative models to suit the nature of Western narrative.

Despite its anti-colonial appeal, African racial pride and championship of socio-historical and cultural values, African literature particularly in English Departments generates its literary canonical identity from the metropolitan marketplace for all English language writings. Since it is a direct product of English models, it considers literariness as the major criterion for its canon formation. Because of its literariness, the short story is accorded some space but on a subordinate level to the novel. Thus short story writing in English is perceived as the practising ground for serious business of novel writing.

The research presented a number of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that can be adduced for the continued relegation of the short story corpus. In the category of external contributors, colonial legacies maintain a perpetual inescapable evaluative dimension to cultural identity and literary appreciation. Since colonial cultural identity is mediated through textual construct, the novel literary tradition is promoted for its superior ideological content and function over the short story. The rise of universities and professorship in Africa in the 1950s contributed to institutionalisation of literary canon. Literary texts are compartmentalised into professionalised disciplines. Professors in academe inscribe the novel as representative of literary canon. Underdeveloped publishing networks dominated by a conglomeration of

publishers from metropolis Britain create a limited audience for African writings, the student body. Publication of literary productions is solely for prescription as set-books in schools and collegiate institutions. The perception of literary creativity as textbook reduces literary text to a mere commodity worth of economic capital. Harsh censorship at home and/or abroad through literary prize culture means writers skew their creative potentials to fit what publishers imagine will sell or win prizes. For instance, most influential African writings in English are published by subsidiaries of metropolitan publishing houses. An amalgam of all these external forces produces a parasitic African literature only capable of taking away authentic African cultural modes, (cultural annihilation) but never to give back to African on whose behalf the academics, publishers and the literary prize culture claim to represent in global community of scholarship. Thus Africa is deprived of not only the richness and potency of the short story but means of achieving, articulating and developing a vision for fighting this deprivation.

The proliferation of the short story genre within the contemporary milieu is not without problems. The rise of the literary movement is not defined as much by grand nationalistic themes but Western ideological configurations. There is an alarming disequilibrium in qualitative production of the genre whereby production favour English language mediated short story discourse. The dearth of Shona and Ndebele short stories is commonplace. Most of the practitioners of the genre live outside Africa/Zimbabwe. Global publishing factories and the exotic Caine Prize initiatives offer incentives for African writers to nurture a 'fervent' desire to tell their own stories through projecting a dystopian image of Africa; Africa bedevilled by anarchy, poverty and crime, among other negatives.

The chapter has also established that literary prize culture permeates all extrinsic factors contributing to the deracination of the short story genre. It is the overriding catalyst about which all other factors (such as perpetuation of colonial legacy, inertia and institutionalized pedagogic recognition) cohere to restrain canonicity. The entire gamut of African literary canon as cultural capital is reduced to material or economic capital. By setting the competitive criteria for literary judgment literary prizes encourage the elevation of African novel as model while exonerating the short fiction as insignificant.

The intrinsic value of the African short story is forever lacerated by an external nucleus whose judgement is a preserve of the elite. The prevalent indifference towards the artistic merit of the short story is a function of academia's inertia to traverse existing boundaries of literary disciplines. This research, therefore, pursues efforts to revise literary models by calling into question the very boundaries of the novel and short story disciplines. The fundamental question is not how the short story should transcend the novel, but rather how the African short story can develop and enlarge conflicting historical and cultural interpretations inherent in present scholarship.

Whereas this chapter unravelled the complexities of the African short story in general the upcoming chapter grows towards the particular short story corpus. It is a close analysis of selected short stories to show that the general claims made in this chapter do not resonate with narrow appeals.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### THE ZIMBABWEAN SHORT STORY'S BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

*To talk of Zimbabwean literature is to talk of the definition of the people themselves. It is to talk of their variedness and their awareness of themselves and their place, here and now and in future. It is rather nonsensical to limit that the definition of Zimbabwean literature is like this or should be like this, when one of the things Zimbabwean literature should not be is static, rigid and undeveloping. A rigid definition which loses sight of the possibilities of the development of our literature is against the very law of creation. Zimbabwean literature will take the route that best expresses or reveals the life and times in which it exists and the hopes, aspirations and fears of its people, (Mungoshi, 1993:44).*

#### 5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a generic overview of the Zimbabwean short story that has largely been studied as the Cinderella of fiction. The chapter sustained the argument that collegiate institutions marginalise the genre for presumably lacking substantial literary value because it tended to appear in popular magazines which the academia rate as very low on literature totem pole. The discussion also revealed that the genre, which is unfairly regarded as the work of apprentices in creative writing, presents a deeply embedded canonical complexity within the academe. Critics fail to locate a substantive position that can define a unanimous base for study of the genre. The complexity entrenches in failure to determine and resolve what exactly critics disagree about. Their polarity seems to revolve around differing conceptions of genre's definition. Indigenous African literary tradition seems not to notice the existence of the genre as a distinct form while critics of literature in English do, albeit on an asymmetrical basis that rates the short story as subaltern to the novel.

This chapter draws the previous generalised discussion of the short fiction towards a peculiar study of the Zimbabwean genre. Specific focus is on Chirere's *Tudikidiki*, (2007) in order to discuss the extent to which the brevity of short genre complements or stands in contradistinction to the rubrics of the theory of minor/hegemonic literary canon. The chapter also calls to question the issue of the genre's metamorphosis (mutation) in its attempt to evade canonical obsolescence. This sub-section discusses the trajectory that the somewhat *de*

*facto* short story canon mapped to re-define its own peculiar pedigree. This exploration determines the extent to which the vicissitudes of media technologies have changed the modes of literary production and genre preferment. The short story is not immune to commercialisation and industrialisation processes bestowed upon literary production by the changing media.

The selective focus on Chirere's *Tudikidiki*, a collection of nineteen Shona short stories, predicates on The Herald columnist, Mashava's reflection that:

*Tudikidiki* occupies its own place in local literature as (one of the few) individually authored short story collection in Shona. Although Zimbabwe is inundated with short story anthologies in English, writers are yet to export their profligacy in the genre in local languages, (Mashava, 2014, The Herald, May, 5, 2014).

Except Chiwome's single-authored *Masango Mavi*, (1998) and the female multi-authored collections, *Masimba*, (1996) and *Totanga Patsva*, (2005) by Zimbabwean Women Writers, the short story in the Shona language is almost non-existent within the contemporary dispensation. In the Herald feature Tapureta, alluding to the paucity of the Shona short story observes:

The short story form in Shona has curiously lagged behind the poetry and novel. You can count only on Emmanuel Chiwome's 'Masango Mavi' and Memory Chirere's 'Tudikidiki'. Thankfully, both books attempt to develop the short story into a reflective and philosophical enterprise. Chiwome and Chirere seem to have benefitted from a full understanding of theory and practice through their work in the academia, (Tapureta, 2015, The Herald, April 29, 2015).

In a concerted effort to fill this void Zimunya and Mungoshi translated into Shona selected short stories from various previously published English anthologies. Their output anthology, *Mazambuko: Nyaya dzemuZimbabwe dzakaturikirwa* (2011) attempts to even the literary space that is heavily dominated by the short story in English. However, there is always serious loss of essence when a work is translated. An anthology read in translation is often shaped by the translators' choices and publisher's framing of the collection for the market

Unlike multi-authored anthologies where peculiar editorial interests and preferences often yield unexpected creative outcomes the single authored collection, *Tudikidiki*, reflects Chirere's individual creative impulse. The organisation of the stories is the writer's

prerogative, unlike in multi-authored anthologies whereby editorial bias and perception of what ‘good work’ is often influence selection. The rise of multi-authored anthologies sought to group stories in terms of editors’ and sponsors’ tastes and preferences, (for instance, the Cain Prize has a peculiar convocation for awarding dystopian African short story). *Tudikidiki*, however, transcends these boundaries. The metaphorical title, *Tudikidiki*, is a critique of the short story genre’s burden of canonical representation. It appears Chirere, the author, uses the extraordinary title as an idiom to signify marginalised voices, as shall be examined in the upcoming exposition.

### **5.1 *Tudikidiki* as axiomatic of repressed signifiers**

Chirere’s collection, *Tudikidiki*, (Little things) struggles against invisibility that threatens not only the writers of Shona short fiction but also the genre itself. He is not only aware of the marginal space to which the Shona short story is confined in the African/Zimbabwean literary canon but also of the institutions (literary and cultural) that interpret its canonical triviality. The author uses the idiom, *Tudikidiki*, to negate the interpellation of the short story genre as marginal. He challenges his readers and critics to acknowledge the worthiness and constructedness of the genre within Zimbabwean literary canon formation. Chirere’s collection, to this end, functions as a meta-commentary on the genre’s politics of canonical otherness. It poses great challenge to the power relations that inform the genre’s canonical representation or none of it. The author confirms Casanova’s (1999) argument that in the struggle against threatening invisibility writers create conditions under which they can be seen. Casanova inscribes:

The creative liberty of writers from the peripheral (category) is not given to them straight away: they earn it ... by inventing complex strategies that profoundly alter the universe of literary possibilities. (...) the methods that they devise for escaping literary destitution become increasingly subtle on the level both of style and of literary politics, (Casanova, 1999:177).

Chirere extols curtness and simplicity as the virtues for re-claiming the voice of the marginalised and deconstructing the power relations that determine the institution of Zimbabwean literary canon. Chirere makes the idea of brevity and plainness a strategy for trafficking both symbolic and cultural value of short fiction within the wider literary canon. Rather than considering minuteness as an accusation of the slightness of form Chirere exalts

tininess as a framework and metaphor for repositioning repressed/marginalised literatures within the African literary canon. Instead of reading the short story as a genre of lesser literary seriousness or lesser fictional status, Chirere contorts the most circular view that small is simple. Hence, *tudikidiki*, (literally ‘tiny little things’) is a convenient appraisal of the thesis that the short story is a more literary form than the novel in expressing the function and power of words. Chirere’s *Tudikidiki*, therefore, can best be read as a metaphor signifying the potency of shortness of form, repressed voiceless children and vignettes of little matters of life.

### **5.1.1 Tudikidiki as expression of brevity and simplicity of form.**

Chirere’s eccentric title, *Tudikidiki*, submits that brevity and simplicity are crucial rudiments of the modern Zimbabwean short story form. Almost all his stories are so short in length that they could be less than 500 words and provide “little” understated details. The length of these nineteen flittingly short stories lies in their depth which gives meaning to experiences. Reviewing this collection Kangira lays out the aesthetic and practical stall for the advantage of brevity. Reminiscent of Poe’s practical consideration for shorter form (as ideal for reading in one sitting,) Kangira reviews:

Coupled with very high entertainment value, the whole booklet can be read on a bus trip from Mbare to Murambinda. Each story stands out clearly and the experience is akin to toying with one crisp biscuit after another, in one’s watery mouth, (Kangira, 2008, *The Herald*, January 10, 2008).

Kangira’s cogent assessment implies that the skillfully contrived stories are craftily timed to make the reader utterly focused in a perusal of three hours. For a ride of less than three hundred kilometers the reader’s soul is entirely at the disposal of the story-teller’s whims. The stories demand unusual concentration which “permits no respite in a series of short stories because ‘starting’ and ‘stopping’ exhausts the reader’s attention,” (Sebate 1999:9).

Chirere’s stories achieve great richness and complexity as a result of brevity. For him brevity should not be viewed in terms of “confinement or limitation of expressive capacity” but as a positive quality capable of producing “its own unique effect of amplitude,” (Hunter,

2007:13). Hunter notes that brevity of form implies a “luminous vision of an art of radical indigence in which we read not a partial object but a total object, complete with missing parts,” (ibid: 139). The genre’s ‘unfinished’ economy becomes a positive attribute to the entailment of the power that defines the short story canon. It justifies the appraisal of the short fiction as an art of implication and dilation. James, quoted in Hunter (ibid: 99) posits:

Telling by means of suggestion or implication is one of the most important of all the modern short stories’ shorthand conventions... Telling never dilates the mind with suggestions as implication does.

Chirere’s deliberate over-simplification of detail frees the short story from the restrictions of conventionality. Rather, it invites experimentation with (or subversion of) the norms of the mainstream. Commenting on the unconventional nature of the genre Tapureta argues that a less observant reader may not be able to “drill past the alluvial layer for nuggets of meaning,” Chirere’s stories convey, (Tapureta, 2014, The Herald, Ma, 5, 2014).

The opening story, ‘Mwana,’ which translates ‘Child,’ may cursorily be condemned as lacking in breadth yet depth is concealed in its plainness. It is about a child who steals meat from their house. The unscrupulous child’s habitual deviancy becomes an obstacle that ultimately leads him to escape, with nothing, into a nearby jungle. Cursorily read, this story refuses to offer a world of order necessary for entering into a serious literary scope. The sequence appears disrupted and not “stitched together as a novel narrative (would be) by a conscious mind,” (Colibaba, 2010:229). The climax of the story and conversely its denouement, is that Mwana

*Akati panze svaku, ndokutizira muchisango. Kutiza, kuita kunge asina kumbenge aedza kugocha nyama masikati pamba pasina vanhu!* (Chirere, 2007:1).

The child jumped outside and escaped into the forest. He ran as though he had not attempted to braai meat in broad day light when he was alone at home.

The plot appears too simple to superimpose an ideological reading akin to African/Zimbabwean literature. The story of a child stealing meat from his own parents’ house sounds too naïve too warrant scholarly attention. Mungoshi observes:

I suppose the writer could be laughing down his throat at the mental gymnastics of even the most well-meaning readers as they try to ‘interpret’ these ‘little things... As I read them I am at times persuaded not to try to find any meaning in some of them



but to simply read, read, and enjoy – or be frustrated, (The Sunday Mail December, 2007).

Yet the stories are “code-protected” and the meaning is “reserved for Chirere’s eccentric stock characters alone to tell their own stories, your own and the world’s, chiefly from infant lenses,” (Tapureta, 2014, The Herald, 5 May 2014).

Similarly, “Mandiziva?” dwells on a simple plot of an old township tramp who walks up to any home claiming to be related to whoever can feed him, a ploy he executes routinely to claim his daily bread. Mandiziva, who plays at being a ‘no-nonsense-long-lost’ old relative from the rural areas, is entertained like a king. The neighbourhood wakes up to the reality when the comfortably fed has already left. Like “Mwana” and almost all the stories in the collection, this story can easily be dismissed as superficial. Their seemingly disjunction, shallowness and inconclusiveness would be regarded, *prima facie*, as accusations for slightness, euphemism for lesser literary status. However, Chirere utilizes such presumed limitedness and simplicity as a ruse for the short genre to reclaim its special status. His stories retain a tight structure which acts as a frame governing his narrative to remain in a fragmentary but suggestive state. The story, “Mwana,” for instance, metaphorically castigates people’s misplaced wishes and desire that in the end result in them escaping into worse situations. Likewise, the story, “Mandiziva?” satirises the unorthodox survival strategies people resort to for coping with unaffordability of city life.

The complexity of Chirere’s somewhat simple plots lies in their fragmentation, subjectivity and partiality which he extols above the traditional conventions of the elaborate, universal and representative qualities of the novel. The plots are spatially architectural; each plot is so intricately constructed architecture that to dislodge a single word would ruin the entire fabric.

Kangira argues that despite teeming with seemingly petty fraudsters, some of the stories deal with serious matters of life. He chronicles:

The lesson is: Do not be too engrossed only in the big struggles of survival. Turn your head over your shoulder to check what the next man or woman is doing. You are being invited to pay close attention to the little matters of life -Tudikidiki - and to laugh at yourself, if you can, (Kangira, 2008, The Herald, January 10, 2008).

Chirere's stories achieve unity of impression by dealing with a single predominant incident, simple plot and limited number of characters, (usually one). The scope of each story is limited to a particular slice of life experience Chirere intends to share with his readers. For instance, "Kamwe Karwizi," which portrays the manner in which music infiltrates the human consciousness, demonstrates Chirere's artistry in employing a single image from the unconscious mind to fuel a story in a relatively un-translated state. The image of "karwizi," (Small River) acts as a metaphor for the flow of music which consumes and absorbs the totality of human body and soul "retaining an air of mystery and impenetrability and an air of dream... as consciously representational image" (Colibaba, 2010:228). The rivulet-image functions in relation to the unconscious mind to "trace the whole flow of music into the human body, and trance-like, shape how individuals are given visions by a single piece of music" (Hove, 2010). Thus Chirere is as adroit at effectively expressing meaning in the non-verbal image-token world of imagery as he is crafty at omitting words whose tendencies defy his pre-established design. As Colibaba avers, the short story is a strongly unified art-form that functions in multiple and economic ways to maintain an intense minimum of waste. The intensity does not only manifest in the preference of plots of smaller magnitude, but also in the tendency to leave significant details to inference.

Hence he places emphasis on the effect of 'singleness' to achieve the brevity of length. Simplicity in Chirere's stories is achieved by his denial of irrelevant details of emotional and artistic luxury. He restricts himself to essentials by "maintaining a tight structure, swift progress, strong concentration and precision," (Sebate 1999:10). The effect manifests in the preference for plots of smaller magnitude; what Colibaba (op cit: 226) refers to as "plots of discovery, static or discovery plots."

Reminiscing on the brevity of the short story Colibaba (2010:227) argues that:

There is no space for cross reference or repetitions in the short story. It is a more literary form than the novel in its orientation towards the power words hold or release and create over their mimetic and explanatory function.

Colibaba regards such limitedness as a "frame" that acts as an aesthetic device that permits ellipses to remain in the story. Ellipsis gives a "necessary air of completeness and order due to the very existence of the frame," (ibid: 227). Thus readers anticipate a degree of elision

and uncertainty in Chirere's stories. Chirere's tendency to leave significant details to inference creates an intensity which stirs the reader's imagination. Intensity achieved by "the elliptical structure of the story" (Colibaba *ibid*: 228) offers a special space for the workings of the reader's imagination. Colibaba employs the phrase "elliptical structure" to refer to the marked ellipsis created by extreme economy of words thereby creating deliberate obscurity as a literary style. As Colibaba suggests, elision or gaps within the text of a story offers space for the reader's image making faculty to initiate desire and invite the reader to enter the text.

The desire is linked to fantasy which we cannot define in terms of a negative or antithetical relationship to the real, (Colibaba, *ibid*: 228).

For him fantasy points to what exists beyond the known or the real. It is not an inversion of reality "but works on margins of reality" and thus on the "dangerous edge of the unknown," (*ibid*: 228).

According to Du (2015) the reader's psychology and horizon of expectation at any given time is significant for the social acceptance of the writer and his work. Accordingly, readership endows the writer and exerts significant influence upon the production, distribution and consumption of his content and form. Chirere's short stories fit such transformation to cater for the reader's psychological needs which, ultimately influences their canonical reception. In view of receptive aesthetics the readers construct textual meaning with their active participation which adds space for interpretation. The reading orientation serves as a vein of literary canonical acceptance. Du posits:

Social recognition needs testing by the average readers and critics as they constitute an indispensable part of canonisation... whether literary works are canonized, recognized or recommended by authorities, they still depend on reading experience of the general readers and critics, (Du, 2015:63).

Chirere himself concedes, "Every time we talk about books we forget to talk about the reading process. We forget to listen to readers' views." Chirere engages his readers by privileging experiential fragmentation, dislocation and arbitrariness over eventful sequences. He lets his readers discover the meaning inductively through the congruence of characteristics derived from their lived experiences, thus achieving a unified effect and intensity necessary for the social acceptance of his stories.

Chirere's unified intensity reflects in closure. Unlike most modern short stories that retain an obvious anticipation of ending or closure, Chirere's stories are governed by anti-closure gesture. For instance, the story, "Mandiziva?" generates its effect from the tension of closure it denies. Its ending is more open and tentative. Mandiziva, the culprit's ruse of surviving by pretention goes unpunished, therefore is unrepentant. The non-closure creates suspense suggestive of "the idea of progression towards an end" aimed at concentrating the readers' thoughts and feelings, "whether or not the end really comes," (Sebate, 1999:10). Hunter, (2007:55) argues, therefore, that the short story's "artful abstemiousness makes its presence more than just structural lacunae, ellipsis or diversion." Its 'unfinished' economy is an artistic quality vying for its canonical representation or recognition.

Writing in the consciousness of the genre's peripheral existence, Chirere uses brevity and plainness as the central locus for the production of a counter hegemonic canon. Kiguru (2016:133) contends that marginality "nourishes one's capacity to resist." Kiguru implies that the marginal space offers a writer the possibility of radical perspectives from which to create and imagine new alternatives. Chirere subverts the short story canonical otherness by fully inhabiting and operating within the confines of marginality as a form of resistance. According to Kiguru, (ibid: 133) writers "rely on form and content" and engage in "persistent solipsism and self-consciousness" as a currency to achieve symbolic and cultural significance within the wider literary canonical heritage. *Tudikidiki*, therefore, subverts the different systems of canonical powers so that the short story genre can also hog the limelight.

### **5.1.2 Tudikidiki as metaphor for repressed voice**

Chirere's stories are populated with narratives from marginal characters, usually children. These children are represented as voiceless, faceless or unknown. They are people living in the margins of the society as social refugees, social exiles, street children or social misfits "whose African identity is often ambivalent, subject to negotiation and (constantly) under threat," Kiguru (2016:137). Thus, the stories are told from the perspective of the supposedly naïve protagonists whose voices are either "suppressed or silenced by virtue of being on the margins," (ibid: 137).

In the preface of this book, Mabasa warns critics against downplaying the stories for their brevity and simplicity maintaining that these are not stories for children but about (or by) children. Unlike his predecessors who perceived the short story as belonging to the category of children's literature, Chirere does not define his readership in terms of the child/ adult dichotomy. His stories appeal to readers across the divide. Having observed this Kangira admits, "the word 'children' is more complex than meets the eye. The struggles in life bring out the most basic instincts, making us all children," (Kangira, *The Herald*, 10 January 2008). Kangira cites the story 'Amai nababa,' about an innocent girl child who yearns to see her parents together, in love. When her wishes are achieved through her own way she senses worrisome presence of other forces beyond the control of the three characters. Kangira sums up his overall impression of Chirere's use of child protagonists by asserting:

Memory Chirere is at his best with stories with subterranean meanings and you might be caught reading and rereading these stories for their various levels of meaning and wit. I have come across this in the few stories of Langston Hughes, (ibid).

Perhaps, the most perverse story is 'Pembani Pembani.' Nobody imagines that the child protagonist, Pembani, deserves equal treatment, right to education, adequate food and clothing like everybody else. No one dares nurture his artistic/ creative talent. Out of frustration from Pembani's 'poor' drawings, his teacher once beat him, misjudging his creative impulse and dismissing him as being ignorant. The beating exposes Pembani's tortured inner-landscape as his childhood psyche attempts to salvage its sanity amidst social malaise. However, when Miss Zuva gives him a pat on the back Pembani smiled. The small gesture became a consummate token of appreciation to enhance his creative acumen. When annoyed by social injustices, rhetoric gestures without content or real meaning on the ground, children often become passive. Uncertainty and inertia haunts the children's creative potentials for a long time before they could really find their own definite voices.

If a child's effort is supported an excitement of spirit would make the child marvel in search of the unattainable elixir. The pat on Pembani's back presaged a restive and avid determination to develop his own paradigm upon which he could anchor his artistic vision. Thus Pembani demonstrates that punishment is a heavy and ugly dose for motivation and is potentially crippling of talents. Through this story Chirere explores the social construction of reality that the taken-for-granted reality congeals for the children. As Berger and Luckmann,

(1997) argue, an awareness of the social foundation of values and perspectives on human thoughts are the instruments in the struggle for survival and power. They postulate:

Man's consciousness is determined by his social being. (...) False consciousness arises within the social significance of deception and self-deception and of illusions as ... condition of life," (Berger and Luckmann, 1997:5).

Pembani's resentment, as a generative factor of his apathy, represents children's specific application of "the art of mistrust," (ibid: 5) yet his smile, when his effort has been appreciated, serves to show that social acceptance determines the content of the children's ideation. Berger and Luckmann (ibid: 6) write:

Human knowledge is given in society as an a priori to individual experience, providing the latter with its order of meaning ... relative to a particular socio-historical situation ... appealing to individual as the natural way of looking at the world.

The reason for Chirere's reliance on child protagonists is to articulate not only the experience of socially and politically marginalised but the short story's condition of canonical otherness. The deployment challenges the canonical status of minor literary genres. As Morton (2010) elucidates, the figure of the marginal protagonist

...is a powerful rhetoric device precisely because it gives voice to subaltern histories in order to persistently question the disempowerment of subaltern (genres) in the contemporary era of neo-liberal globalisation. Such rhetoric devices exemplify the way in which the aesthetic strategy of many (contemporary) text concerned with marginality are always connected to a struggle for social and political empowerment, (Morton, 2010:179).

Morton's comment confers honour to Chirere who presents children as the symbolic capital that contests claims of a dominant Western imposed canon. Chirere's child characters occupy a convenient space for challenging the concept of hegemony canon and renegotiating marginal representation of short fiction in African literary canon. The depiction of children as representatives of marginal social structures charts a literary space for writers to embrace marginality as an oppositional discursive strategy that counters hegemonic or hierarchical canonical codes. These subaltern personalities are, therefore, vital for raising and negotiating questions about the skewed relationship of the canonical and non-canonical prose texts. It is from the margin that Afro-centered writers, critics and theorists negate dominant European imperial culture.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1978) probe the center/ periphery gulf to endorse the position of the marginalized *other* within this divide. They contend that contemporary writers striving to inhabit and own the places previously considered peripheral are consciously dismantling those binaries. They expound:

Dismantling such binaries does more than merely assert the independence of the marginal; it also radically undermines the very idea of center, deconstructing the claims of a European colonizer to a unity and fixity of a different order from that of other. In this sense, the dismantling of center/ margin models of culture calls into question the claim of any culture to possess a fixed, pure and homogeneous body of values and exposes them all as historically constructed and corrigible formations, (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1978:37).

Kiguru (2016) embraces the notion of writers dismantling and reasserting the centre/ periphery dialectics as an expression of canonical constructedness of marginal discourses. He resolves that by inhabiting the marginal space “writers are participating in a process of breaking the hierarchy of domination” within the African literary canon, (Kiguru, (2016:161). The previously marginalised short story is becoming a constant in resisting the set of representations that categorize it as other. As Kiguru advances, the resistance to being othered should not aim at actuating the power that centrality entails. Thus the focus should not be to reverse the power relations but to deconstruct the core/ margin abstraction. The power relations that exist between the core/ margin binary structure is not linear but a complex, multifaceted and continuous process. This view complements Casanova who opines:

In the literary world, domination is not exerted in an unequivocal way. Because hierarchical structure is not linear, it cannot be described in terms of a simple model or single centralized dominant power. If literary space is relatively autonomous it is also, by the same token, relatively dependent on political space, (Casanova, 1999:115).

Thus, it is from the margins of social subordination that Chirere stamps his authority to contest, in order to inhabit and own the previously contested literary terrain. He does not seek to explicitly extricate the mainstream but uses suspense and suggestion to prompt critics to seek out a wider insight into the canonical position of the genre. The focus on marginal literary canons is not an attempt to reverse the status quo but to deconstruct the centre/ periphery schism evident in extant institutionalized literary canon. The imperative for leveraging the canonical value of the short story “should not aim at the accumulation of the power that centrality entails,” (Kiguru, opcit: 62). The construction of the somewhat rival short story canon seeks not to replace the official canon but to be an alternative to it. The aim

is to provide wider and new grounds of canonical representation by dismantling conventional canonical boundaries. Thus Chirere's stories, like any contemporary writer's, tap into and pursue canonical recognition through defying conventions drawn from traditional forms.

The proliferation of the short story, that for long, has suffered a literary blackout due to restrictive definitions of African literary canons, provides writers with the opportunity to "experiment with form, media content and language," (ibid: 91). As Kiguru stress, this gives birth to new literary trends and publications that not only transform creative writing but also enrich the literary canon. Mainstream critics (conservatives) might not heed this and may set off the great debate about definition and boundaries between mainstream literature and the role of new cultural institutions in the creation of a literary canon. Yet the short story has phenomenally become the "medium for much that has been new (innovative) in modern fiction," (Hunter, 2007:3).

### **5.1.3 Tudikidiki as vignette snapshots of the realities of life.**

Mlambo (2013:24) describes the contemporary Zimbabwean short story as an intensely subtle but deeply penetrating "snapshot of the life that is our reality." Mlambo elicits a view of modern short story as a metaphorical vehicle for presenting the reality that guides conduct of everyday life of the crisis-hit post-independence Zimbabwe. The phenomenon that has come to be known as Zimbabwean 'crisis' spawned unprecedented proliferation of short story writing at the turn of the millennium. Most of the collections, usually in English, use the short story medium as a vehicle for presenting coping mechanisms to survive the crisis. The crop of nascent writers presents the crisis-hit Zimbabwe as entrenched in contradictions of power-based asceticism in which the socio-economic platform is marred by politicking. An essentialist view of the crisis characterizes Zimbabwe as a "hub of immorality, corruption, loss of innocence, dissent and the (citizens) as a lost deranged powerless victim of this monster," Mlambo (2013:2). Such essentialism produces a myopic literature that fails to pave socio-economic and political leeway out of the predicament.



Chirere uses the short story as the most suitable medium for challenging the Afro-pessimist models that championed description of the crisis in Western essentialist terms. *Tudikidiki* brings into focus new forms of collective agency and alliances for survival. In as much as Chirere's stories are snapshots of Zimbabwean life, these snapshots project a specific agglomeration of reality in which the 'taken-for-granted' reality congeals for ordinary and marginalised. He is interested in portraying how this reality appears for the tangential social groups. The pictures or vignettes of the reality that these stories represent are Chirere's own version and interpretation of them.

The story, "Roja rababa vaBiggie" (The lodger of Biggie's father,) is a reflection of the fleetingness and fragility of modern existence. The township lodger seemed to be a quiet, loyal and diligent asset to Biggie's father until the day he decides that the landlord owes him. The lodger demands his money back. As a decoy to get his rentals' returns the lodger held the landlord at a technical ransom. He climbs up to the top of a tower light and tells the people that he would throw himself down to death if Baba vaBiggie fails to honour his bargain. The lodger performs some funny monkey dances on the tower light as he shouts to draw attention of on-lookers.

The acme of this one-man drama attains when the lodger turns his decency and diligence to crudest show of resistance. The enthralled onlookers watch him with mixed feelings of excitement and fear. Reveling in the people's looks of awe, the man feels in total control as if he were a god. Baba vaBiggie had to make the payment through a trusted third party for the lodger to come down.

The lodger's melodramatic enactment shows a conscious but stubbornly primitive act of resisting the "defining modern trends of urbanisation, massification and commoditisation," (Robertson, 1995:47). In this way this story achieves, for Chirere, great richness of complex aesthetic virtues out of the contemporary society's phenomenal fragmentary dislocation. Chirere demonstrates that perspectives on human thought are instruments in the struggle for survival and power. The lodger's resentment arises out of the landlord's false conscious sense of reality. Everyday reality presents itself as it is interpreted not only by the influential in a

social context but also by marginal man whose interpretation is subjectively meaningful to him.

Reinforcing the replication of the modern short story to a snapshot of life, Gordimer (1968) quoted in Hunter (2007:2) posits:

Short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of- the present moment. Ideally, they have learned to do without explanation of what went before and what happens beyond this point.

The way Chirere's stories privilege pragmatic fragments over eventful historical sequence makes the genre amenable to the representation of the increasingly fragmented contemporary social order. As Hunter, (2007:2) admits, the short form is "ideally calibrated to the (fragmented) experience of the contemporary life" characterised by the chronic sense of "uncertainty, historical sequestration and social isolation." The genre's brevity and plainness accords it the right blend of detachment and peculiarity to easily express the fragmentary structure of the present consciousness. The very "fragmentariness of the genre gives it a unique and distinctive role" (Shaw, 1983:228) in the contemporary literature.

Chirere accumulates fragments by the handful then rearranges them until they begin to reveal their hidden coherence, and unity. His short stories, while often rooted in identifiable social phenomena turn in general on human intricacies of a psychological and emotional nature, and this is the basis of the short story as a form. Because the stories are by definition shorter, they are expressions of a more coherent moment of conception. Chirere never tries to find definite answers for the social dilemma. Rather he simply immortalizes the conflicts without being biased or lenient to anyone. Tapureta asserts:

As in all the stories, Chirere does not sit in judgment over the offender. He neither condones situational ethics nor condemns dishonest survival tactics, leaving it to the reader to reach a verdict, (Tapureta, 2015, May, 5, 2015).

Reviewing Chirere's collection, Muchiri explores the intricacies embedded in minuteness that the title, *Tudikidiki*, suggests. He writes:

*Mukuona bhuku raMemory Chirere rinonzi Tudikidiki zvakandipa mubvunzo wekuti tudikidiki chii? Zvakare izvi zvakandipa havi yokuda kuziva chacho chinonzi tudikidiki. Tunyaya turi kutaura nezvezvinhu zvatisingawaniri nguva yokunyatsotarisa mazuva ose. Zvinhu zviya zvatinoti kana tikazviona hatina hanya nazvo asi izvo zviriri izvo zvinoumba zvatiri. Izvo zvidikidiki izvozvi ndizvo zvine hanya nevana vari*

*kutaura nyaya mubhuku raChirere, Tudikidiki. Zvinhu zvatinoti savakuru hazvina basa ndizvo zvinebasa kuvana vari kutaura nezvazvo ava.* (Muchiri, 2012 July 25, <http://mudararatinashemuchiri.blogspot.com/>)

In seeing Memory Chirere's book, *Tudikidiki*, it gave me the stir to probe what little things could really be. This gave me the desire to want to know what exactly small things are. Stories in this collection are about those insignificant things one rarely muses about. Those things we do not care about yet they are the things that shape our identities. These minute things are the concern of the child protagonists narrating them. The things that adults usually subordinate as subsidiary give substance to children's voices.

Kangira (2010) concedes to Muchiri's remarks. He observes:

Some of these stories are teeming with both serious and petty fraudsters. The lesson is: Do not be too engrossed only in the big struggles of survival. Turn your head over your shoulder to check what the next man or woman is doing. You are being invited to pay close attention to the little matters of life -*Tudikidiki* - and to laugh at yourself, if you can.

As Mungoshi observes, Chirere's stories have 'something' which is haunting. People create situations over things they do not understand, and the end result is panic or chaos. Very small things which could have been "resolved quietly or peacefully become big issues that lead to the cracking up of personalities and the breaking up of communities and institutions," (Mungoshi, *The Sunday Mail* December, 2007).

In a way, Chirere challenges Afro-pessimism which he castigates in his fiction through invocation of satire. Zawadi (2015) defines satire as a genre of literature in which vices and follies, abuses and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals into improvement. Intention of satire is to shame the target person or institution due to their misbehavior in order to change. Chirere employs satire as a device to contrast the honesty or tranquility of childhood with the vices of modern life of over indulgence, acquisitiveness, gluttony, corruption, theft, forgery, uncontrolled luxury, murder, untold sexual practices, perjury and the pretensions of the affluent "as kinds of peccadillo and wrongdoings of identical scale and enormity," (Senkoro, 2008:36). The purpose is to make readers laugh at their own vices and at the ridiculousness of others. Laughter as a major element of satire turns into a kind of "psychological panacea which makes us reflect on ourselves and on those around us," (Zawadi, 2015:4).

Thus Chirere's satire recreates his hypothecated dream of a progressive Africa. For instance, the story, *Roja rababa vaBiggie* lampoons the landlords' propensity and predisposition to literally own their lodgers as money-making surrogates. Thus Biggie's father's uncouth behaviour towards his lodger had gone beyond tolerable limits to a point where the sphere vehemently challenges the social mores. The same can be read in '*Mamboonawo Mhuri Yangu here?*' It is an Aesopian tale about looking for someone who could be looking for you. And when you get to where he was, he is where you were, and because you put so much faith in speed and accuracy, you might never meet with the person you so much want to meet. More stinging blows come in *Pempani Pempani*, *Pikicha*, *Pasi Pengoma* and many more. The laughter generated by these stories is corrective. Although Chirere employs satire to be humorous his greatest purpose is to use it as a constructive social criticism. He uses wit as a weapon to draw attention of both particular and wider issues in society. This prompts Kangira to comment:

The journey of life is portrayed as both awkward and funny and the man or woman who listens carefully to her soul, wins. Chirere's wit is honey coupled up with grit and the conversations are dreamlike and childlike," (Kangira, 2008, *The Herald*, January 10, 2008).

Kangira alludes to Chirere's use of irony as an element of satire. The particular situations Chirere creates in these short stories bear a special significance in the ironic undercurrents of the contemporary society. Irony is a view of life which recognizes that every event is open to multiple interpretations, of which none is simply right and the co-existence of incongruities is a part of the structure of existence. Chirere had ample use for irony in his works due to inherent irony in the society. Thus, for Chirere, irony becomes circumstantial manifesting in the choice of the situation he depicts in his narratives. Since his short stories reveal a photographic image of an episode, the very choice of a moment of time to capture is, in itself, an ideological statement. The situations Chirere captures are ironic. The irony impregnates the ideology of the stories. The class struggle in the society has riddled everyday life with so much of contradictions that any authentic presentation of the social reality carries with it this bundle of conflicting interest.

Chirere has moved from being a 'chronicler of history' to a social reformer. He observes the social codes that determine being a 'marginal' element in the society. His observations retain an attainable social accuracy much more clear than those directly involved in the political

struggle. Irony has always been an essential element of Chirere's narrative technique, his irony appears to be more pervasive and subtler and from time to time making it hard for a 'new' reader with no frame of reference to his writing as a whole to grasp the meaning, for there are hardly any fixed points. In an interview Gordimer once commented:

When I wrote the story I was only registering and interpreting what I had actually seen. I used empathy in that story, I intended no irony. It entered on its own. The irony in this story is a by-product of my looking back on the episode, of the process of understanding it, shortly after. But as I said earlier on, irony is an appropriate way of tackling (contemporary) Africa, (Gordimer, 1980 available online at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol2/iss1/4>).

The fragmentariness and ironic nature of Chirere's short writings have claimed for the genre a stable recognition in the literary canon of the contemporary milieu due to their suitability to reflect the present age of unrest, disbelief and distrust much more than either novel or poetry does. In the context of African literary canon, where social responsibility lurks even in the genesis of creativity, the contemporary tenor of the short story comes on board. Jean De Grandsaigne and Gary Spackey rightly points out that "by far the greatest number of African [short story] writers are interested in depicting present-day situations and problems" because "the needs, aspirations, and the anxieties of the present world looms very large upon the African short story," (Ariel, 15, 2, 75).

## **5.2 *Tudikidiki* and the quest for canonical representation**

Chirere's short story anthology, *Tudikidiki*, preserves a rich and complex contrastive framework for creating a canonical grammar required for interpreting contemporary Zimbabwean social experiences. His short stories do not present simple dogma; instead, they serve as dialectical canon resources for articulating the imperatives of a rich contrastive canon. They constitute models of what defines Zimbabwean literary canon. It is the assertion of this thesis that literary canon is a repository of invention that challenges writers' and canonisers' capacity to make further developments in a genre or style. This calls attention to what can be done within a literary medium. According to Altieri, (1983) canons are essentially strategic constructs by which societies maintain their own interests, allow control over the texts they take seriously and the methods of interpretation that establish the meaning.

It becomes pointless to theorise about canons unless the “the possibility of finding common principles of judgment within circular conditions is granted,” (Altieri, 1983:41).

Altieri argues that the practical ideas about the nature of African literary canon rarely derive from explicit theoretical principles or empirical encounters with a range of texts. They derive from what is learnt about African literature within African cultural frameworks partly constituted by our notions of the canonical. As Altieri argues, literary canons are simply ideological banners for social groups; social groups propose them as forms of self-definition. Since the valuing dimension of criticism is inescapably ideological:

If there are no longer any central stories that unify society but only stories defining the desires of distinct segments within society, then our view of the canon should supposedly correspond to social reality, should perhaps par by this fragmentation into articulate differences. (Altieri, *ibid*: 39).

Accordingly, critics hope to either impose a singular canon that is seen as favouring Africa’s own concerns or take a more complex stance that emphasizes the liberal play of interests in society that ultimately expands the canon. Wilczek (2012) accedes to Altieri’s idea that canon discussions can produce one of two consequences; either perpetuating extant mainstream canonical tradition or creation of new canon by calling the very notion of canon into question. He insists:

Canon has been viewed as the expression of cultural authority created by the other people influential in the past. (...) defined as the space of cultural conflict ... as debatable ground, the ground of the battle between various groups, practices and institutions ... ongoing hermeneutics of suspicion that can produce one of two consequences, (Wilczek, 2012: 1687).

The reflections gained through Chirere’s short stories in *Tudikidiki* illuminate the contention that Zimbabwean literary canon should emphasize the positive and energetic elements of the various historical periods and forces that contribute towards forming a wider canon that capture the modern conditions in the conveyance of its message. The canonical importance of Chirere’s transportation lies in their evocation of the ancient fireside *ngano* narratives in which the storyteller had a way of fascinating his audience with imagined pictures and sounds, often for the fun of it. Mungoshi senses

...a new direction in the Shona short story, releasing it from the usual hidebound traditional oral *rungano*, to throw it in line with its written counterpart in the other,

international languages, but the flavour is strictly (Chirere's), homegrown and home brewed, (Mungoshi, The Sunday Mail December, 2007).

Conclusively, Memory Chirere's *Tudikidiki* is an enjoyable collection of Shona short stories worth prescription for study. Summing up a review of the anthology Mungoshi inscribes:

Even though a few of these stories left me feeling that they verge on the obscure, I still have a nagging feeling maybe it is my own lack of access to the writer's artistic lexicon. Whatever the case is, these stories don't fail to tickle your rib, if not riddle your mind. These are serious adult stories (despite appearances to the contrary) written with a poet's sensibilities, (Mungoshi, 2007, The Sunday Mail December, 2007).

Each of these short stories is "extremely brief, maybe the shortest of any Zimbabwean writer, but they take you through very weight experiences, (Zondo, 2010 web). Zondo suggests that a short story, for Chirere is simply a tumultuous episode in the life of characters. What is short, then, is the narration, not the experience itself. Even then, the narrative is not generated out of nothing. It is produced by the culture, inscribed and accessed in myths, norms, values and cultural tradition which define the African world view and ideology. The referent of narration is never detached from immediate reality. Rather, it narrates an episode which has been "symbolised and re-symbolised" within "a shared imaginaire" of symbolic heritage (Recoeur 1984:28) which he, Recoeur, (1984:36) refers to as "the imaginary nucleus of any culture." The canonical importance of Chirere's stories cannot be over-emphasized.

### **5.3 The Zimbabwean Short Story and Techno-genesis: challenges and complexities**

This section discusses the changing roles of the Zimbabwean short story canon within the contemporary digitalised multimedia landscape. For the anxiety of obsolescence, the genre is gradually mutating to become an electronic story, (e-story). As the multimedia environment closes in on its perception, the very concept of literary representation of the short story has become problematic compelling further explorations about Zimbabwean literary canon. This section, therefore, quizzes whether or not electronic literature is acceptable as description of literature in the traditional sense. It problematises canonical representation of the e-short story within African literary hierarchies. The imperative for this invigoration is to establish whether or not literary quality can be retained in digitally mediated literature. There is need to find out if writers in the hyperactive but ephemeral cyberspace achieve such lasting stature of

canonical writers as Hove, Mungoshi or Achebe. The challenge is to determine whether the evolution of online literary culture develops existing forms of literary representation in ways impossible offline, in terms of socio-cultural innovations. On the other hand, digitalised mediatised literature challenges the conventions underpinning literary theories of short story analysis. The procedural nature of cybernetic literature requires new critical models of interpretation.

According to Ngugi (2004) and Ojaide (2012) Modern Africa literature now thrives in a world of contradictions in which human technology and ingenuity open up endless frontier in internal and outer spaces. Ngugi suggests that every phenomenon in nature, society and thought, including the very character of Africa's being, is affected by the internal and external dynamics of the new technological advancements. Ojaide argues that as far as globalisation and multi-media technologies are concerned, critics should look at how new African writings are influenced by the internet, blogging, Facebook and other forms of popular media. That there is an online-based literature in Africa with frequent publications of online poetry and short story cannot be denied. In Hayles' (2008:2) parlance, the place of African writing is "in turmoil, roiled now not by the invention of print books but the emergence of electronic literature." The new media order suggests that cultural exchanges are becoming more complicated within the technological overlapping scapes.

The emergency of digital and internet technologies challenges the notion of an African literary canon. The bone of contention arises on whether or not digital works can generate brand new literary values. Rettberg (2003:5) quizzes whether such values, if any, can "challenge traditional aesthetic claims to perfection, consistency and stability." The dispute hovers on whether e-literature can construct a canon fixed for posterity. Given that "digital literature resists any claims for physical permanence because of the liability of the device," it would be certain that some important works may not survive due to "the contingencies of the media they are produced (and) because of their dependence on software and hardware platforms that are subject to cycles of obsolescence," (Rettberg, 2003:4-5). Can the contingencies of the media, due to their incredibly diverse range of technical formats, derive a process of canonisation for e-literature? Canonisation, as a complex unfolding process of collective field building that spins decades, is always a problematic venture and any effort to



construct a particular canon poses challenges to canonisers. Whether or not there could be an established canon of electronic literature is a matter of enduring and unresolved debate.

According to Carbone, ([www.apeiro.iulms.org](http://www.apeiro.iulms.org)) “virtual communities blur national boundaries,” globalise knowledge and epistemic systems, promotes “multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, post-human conditions of subjectivity and hypertextuality.” The use of new media imposes a massive global configuration of cultures, literature and publishing to the extent that the debate about literary canon no longer centres on the resentment theory of the conflict of centre versus margin or representation against non-representation of literary works. Instead, in a wider perspective, the debate calls to question the meaning of literary canon in cybernetic notions of time and space. The disputation becomes a quest to determine whether there exists a singular transnational literary canon which can be shared in boundary-less or limitless global space.

Since canonisation is a matter of constitution of power, the attainment of canonical status of electronic literature entails, hermeneutically, an acquisition of prestige, visibility and authority within literary circles. Technically, the internet and new media technologies convey a strangely new historical placement of literary text. Electronic literary texts do not exist in material form but as huge volumes of bytes of information inscribed on a digital platform. Deprived of the paper form, electronic literature acquires canonical authority that emerges from beyond time and space. It, therefore, becomes a form of evoked content which emits a peculiar impression not only because of non-representation of any particular culture but also because it exists in the non-space of cybernetics. The somewhat mythical dimension of the cyberspace disembodies textuality from its material substratum dispossessing the “artistic object of its solid cultural foundations,” (Carbone, *ibid*: 5). Carbone opines that attempt to revalorise the content and plot of e-texts, for canonical purposes, is often pervaded by nihilism. Carbone’s idea of nihilism excites scholars to postulate two major trends of contemporary African and World literatures which complicate online literary canon formation. Discussed briefly, here-under, are these two emergent new media trends that more likely hinder effort to canonise digital literature.

### **5.3.1 Emerging new media trends: online short story writing**

According to Carbone, (web) electronic literature exists in cybernetic non-space, which means it acquires its authority from beyond time and space. In this present era of digital literature, time has been compressed by reducing the “distance between different points in space, and the sense of space ... led people to feel that local, national and global spaces become obsolete,” (Cheng, 2010:1). The impact of the new media literature manifests in new media trends of writing as new forms of aesthetics. New media brings forth new digital aesthetic views which accelerate new trends of writing. Due to the thrust of new media the emergent trends create new social networks and activities redefining political, cultural, economic, geographical and other boundaries of human society. These new definitions expand social relations and accelerate social exchange of “both micro-structures of personhood and macro-structures of community,” (ibid: 2). Cheng implies that digital technologies generate virtual experiences and realities that “effectuate the free alteration of one’s gender, personality, appearance and occupation. The formation of the virtual community crosses all boundaries of human society and changes the way people “perceive reality and have traditionally defined identity,” (ibid: 5). Summarily, writers may either degenerate into avant-garde writing or succumb to literary hybridity, both of which produce anarchic literature in the rhetoric of canonisation.

#### **5.3.1.1 Literary Avant-gardism**

Digital technologies instigate the expansion, intensification and acceleration of social relations and consciousness across world time and space. These cybernetic processes, in which the constraints of the geo-historical structures on social and cultural arrangement seem to recede, rebuild new life experiences for writers leading to new literary and cultural patterns akin to avant-gardism. These processes inspire new and experimental ideas in literature and the arts. The newness, trendsetting ultra-modern ideas allude to a new movement in literature whose works are largely experimental, radical or unorthodox with respect to culture and society. The emergent literature could be a “handmaid of cinema” whose results are predictable; “a revival of traditional literary conventions and a “provocative attempts to shock

through a cannibalisation of patriarchal values and through critical approach to pop-culture” (ibid: 7). The notion of cinema recollects the idea of documentary, with all the vastness of the revolutionary filmmaking. In cinema, every image documents, witnesses, refutes or deepens the reality of a situation, provoking with each showing, a sense of liberated space and a decolonised territory. The film image functions as a liturgical act privileging human beings to hear and be heard. The underlying fact is that the new media technologies can inspire literary forms that are transgressed experimentations with the dynamics of creative processes undertaken by what Carbone terms “Avant Pop.” These are online Avant ‘posters’ who are keen on expressing a common attitude towards Western culture. He avers:

Their concern range from a relationship between man and logic of the markets, the death of ideologies and values in society to the influence of mass media ... to lack of all certainties in our world today, (ibid: 11).

These Avant authors welcome the transformation of the digital era and incorporate technological innovations in their conscious cultural thinking as they adapt their writing to new digital media. Their basic conception of e-literature is informed by what embeds the term, ‘Avant-garde’ which suggests an elitist anti-established sort of production, characterised by the use of experimental techniques, modern, daring and radical. Avant-gardism as a movement emanated from the 1980s global expanse of capitalism, the unparalleled position of the United States of America in international affairs and the worldwide audience for Hollywood film and American popular culture.

The continuation into the new millennium of literary experimentation, particularly due to digital technologies, is a problem for African literature. From an African scholarly perspective, traditional studies seldom connect or integrate well with new media experimentalism and globalisation. Unlike the preceding root-searching generation of African writers solidly anchored to positive African ideals, to a literature steeped in history and the vision of literary work as commitment, the spirit of avant-garde refuses such ideals and values it perceives as anachronistic and artificial. The spirit of avant-garde expresses itself in strong experimental tension, in search for novelty in terms of styles, form and methods presumed to release new expressive possibilities into literature. Afrocentric critics cite peculiar confusions endemic to avant-garde philosophy. According to Berry (2003) Avant-garde literature has the tendency to overemphasise art’s future at the expense of the past, leaving the present work ungrounded. The result of this lop-sidedness is an “impression that

contemporary art bears no relation ... to those historical achievements that have given rise to both arts' significance and to its problems," (Berry, 2003, web). In avant-garde literature, therefore, social themes disappear as attention shifts towards discovery of individual experience and the emotional world. History, if ever it appears in their writing, takes on a subversive significance, suggesting the avant-garde's taste for radical change in perspectives. Their writing shows a desire to deconstruct the official history and offer new interpretations of events as they were experienced by the ordinary people. Hence, Berry's concern with avant-garde's indeterminacy is that its misinterpretation of literature/ art as unpredictable future hedges against historical specificity. They undermine the real difference between artistic practices and serious political action.

The other confusion endemic to Avant writing is its uncritical enthusiasm for any and everything that calls itself innovative. Berry considers unfettered search for innovation, regardless of its sterility, as avant-garde's "promiscuous attention to newness" which habitually conflates novelty with change, ([www.electronicbookreview.com](http://www.electronicbookreview.com)). This confusion creates the impression that artistic advancement results from mere unconventionality. The 'farther out than thou, syndrome denies the Avant writer the societal role to play as social or political guide, a burden that African writers have always assumed.

Taken together, these controversial complexities demonstrate the avant-garde's tendency to represent the historical condition of literature as mere obstacles. This is out of sync with African literature which is a reflection of and reaction to its historical development. The socio-historical context gives a unitary and disciplined vision of African literature that is dominated by the cultural scene. The present study of online Zimbabwean short stories seeks to determine the extent to which African/ Zimbabwean writers have been transformed by the new media. The Avant culture, as discussed above, shows that new media breeds a continuity gap between tradition and innovation within a literary culture. Cheng (2010:4) insists that the fragmented nature of the new media switches "traditional cultural grammar, cultural themes of cultural maps to a new platform, resulting in loss of traditional cultural logic." To what extent have our online Zimbabwean writers resisted being submerged by the avant-garde spirit?

### 5.3.1.2 Hybridisation thesis

The anti-avant-garde writers develop a trend that Lowe (2007) terms the hybridisation thesis. According to Lowe hybridity emphasises that globalisation, technological advancement and migration create cultures that are hybridised, mixed, syncretic and composite. Spielmann and Bolter (2006) define hybridity as a condition in contact zones where different cultures connect, merge, intersect and eventually transform each other. They argue that hybridisation describes a two-way process of borrowing and blending between cultures in which “new incoherent and heterogeneous forms of cultural practices emerge in trans-local places” called “third spaces,” (Spielmann and Bolter, 2006:1). Hybridity, therefore, explains a combination of cultural sameness and difference in which the centre to periphery or vice versa influence and impact upon each other. Western-style modernity introduces to the peripheral Africa its Hollywood cultures, genres and liberal ideas and tastes that create tension between traditional and new media literary conventions. A cursory look at online African literary production reveals that the entire continent is undergoing a rapid rudimentary phase of acculturation and fragmentation of literary discourses in the guise of technological progression. Hybridity suggests that new media technology imposes Western epistemologies, cultural and artistic values on those of less dominant cultures as a form of cultural imperialism.

Digital hybridity integrates a diverse range of modes of representation such as the image, text and space to characterise the profound changes from traditional print media to electronic media. It is a trans-disciplinary gaze for trans-cultural worlds perceived as increasingly complex. Technological hybridity can be a transgressive concept whose efficiency lies on the contamination of pure and authentic African cultural values. This leads to promotion of cultural syncretism. The apparent spread of new media produces conditions that give rise to development of “virtual cosmopolitanism and virtual third cultures,” (Cheng, 2010:5). Through the construction of the third cultural spaces, new hybrid cultures are created, in which people from various cultures gather together to build online communities and form intercultural and social relationships. Cheng insists that these new communities have no limit of time and space which make cultural identity “more dynamic, fluid and relativised,” (ibid: 5). This poses challenges to the autonomy and stability of African cultural identity online.

In literary terms, hybridity produces a condition of artistic imperialism whereby writers and readers embrace the virtual/ cyber space writing with the tenacity of a drowning person. Otherwise, the receptive African culture will be forced to derail from its unique track of cultural evolution, thereby creating a situation of not only cultural disorder, but quasi African literary sensibilities that Obioha (2010:5) decries as “the African experience.” She observes:

The heavy and sophisticated western technologies expressed in communication technologies of the internet and other media advertisement have come heavily on Africa and “the latter is ferociously gulping everything without caution, (Obioha, 2010:5).

African writers have embraced digital writing as platform providing a crucial background foregrounding the short story writing. The internet, social media and other web-based or mobile technologies are considered as turning creative writing into interactive dialogue that permits the creation and exchange of user generated content. The short story, due to its brevity, has been well-adapted to the internet form. Thus, the current online writing suggests that digital technology provides important tools for writers to create different types of texts.

Whilst the global configuration of technology presents new opportunities for creativity, the on-going thesis argues that African writers, readers and critics, whether of print or electronic literature, should consider the convergence of real and virtual spaces. It is their duty to investigate the place of the artist in technological society, the shift in artistic creativity as a result of technology and the possibility of establishing a dialogue between augmented reality and virtual.

Saunders, Rutkowski, Genuchten, Vogel and Orrego (2012:2) define virtual space as an “electronic environment that visually mimics complex physical spaces where people can interact with each other with virtual objects.” Consequently, electronic short story is created and performed within the context of networked and programmable media and is composed of different parts taken from diverse traditions that may not always fit neatly together. Cybernetic literature, (as it is sometimes referred to,) is therefore, informed by powerhouses of contemporary culture as well as electronic visual culture. As such it comprises a ‘trading zone’ in which different vocabularies, episteme and expectations expose the hybridity of such literature. As Hayles contends:

The multimodality of electronic literature challenges writers, users and critics to bring together diverse expertise and interpretative traditions so that the aesthetic strategies and possibilities of e-literature may fully be understood, (Hayles, 2008:22).

The multimodal nature of electronic literature springs from the realisation that readers approach digital works with the expectations informed by their tacit knowledge of print conventions of literary modes. Writers, readers and critics have traditionally been devoted to book history, defined as “the history of the circulation, dissemination and reception of the script and print,” (Hesemeier, 2012:1). The incorporation of research into the transmutation from print to digital or online communities is gaining currency mainly because writers now look for support on the internet. Some economic publishing apparatus that support publication of different genres online are proliferating. The main challenge of this invigoration is to determine how the online African short story can search for and retain its literary autonomy as its print counterpart. The need for an urgent African cultural appraisal of the African experience cannot be an overemphasised imperative if online African authors are to retain African cultural and artistic sensibilities in their writings. The Africanness of their writings is a condition for acceptance into African literary canon.

### **5.3.2 Contemporary Electronic short story: the quest for Canonical autonomy**

The contemporary Zimbabwean short story is intimately associated with “media propaganda, media agencies and agent function” of the general reader (Du, 2015:63). The vicissitudes of media technologies are changing the modes of literary production and genre choices. The short story, owing to relatively ease adaptability for online placement, now exists on the web as either fictional blog entries or collaborative writing projects. Both young budding and established Zimbabwean writers embrace the internet as a powerful and most free platform to write, share and publish their short stories with the world and are exploiting the new media technoscape in droves. Courtesy of online literary journals and magazines, such as *Munyoru literary Journal*, *KwaChirere.blogspot.com* and *Mazwi Zimbabwean Literary Magazine*, etc. writers publish short stories in both indigenous and English languages. Sigauke, Chirere and Mushakavanhu run renowned online blog spots and magazines very instrumental in promoting the Zimbabwean short story writing to international heights. They network a wider general readership traditionally restricted to printed text by the paucity of academic resource

and cultural capital. The easily accessible online short story seems to fit the psychological need of the readers. Writers exploit the market potential of the World Wide Web in order to connect to a larger audience by tapping into social media and the internet.

Sigauke operates *Munyori Literary Journal* as site where both aspiring and established authors can post their in-progress material for online feedback from the audience. Writers also post finished short stories for online publication and consumption both in indigenous African and English languages. Sigauke, the founding editor of *Munyori* says the journal first published Huchu's Shona short story, *MaBlack Boots*. The story is a political comment that satirises the political violence meted on the unarmed public by the heavily armed police. The police are quelling demonstrating citizens who had gathered around Zimbabwe's Parliament house to register their discontent with the present ruling regime.

Sigauke published his own short stories; chief among them was *Vosvika muAmerica mazuva ano*. His stories depict the nostalgic diasporic yearn for home. The story, *Vosvika muAmerica mazuva ano*, derides a youthful Zimbabwean who falls in love with a crazy, old American lady. Their relation is tense and full of upheavals. The story exemplifies what Carravetta (2012) regards as travel/ immigration narratives which focus on travel of ideas, texts, values and ultimately people which underlie modalities of human existence. Sigauke studies inner drama of a youthful character who, after having been uprooted from his African cultural base, seeks substitute refuge to recompose an identity of some sort through betrothal to a white American aged lady. Transposition of exiles, work migrants, refugees or nomadic traditional vagabonds consign creativity to a literary typology which transcribes, linguistic, existential and social negotiations between two locales in a variety of travelogues.

Riding on the success of these early online publications, the Sigauke edited *Munyori Literary Journal* attracted budding and established writers to go digital. It now boasts of numerous short story entries in Shona and English languages from Zimbabwe, East and West Africa and America. Mushayabasa, an established canonical poet (whose poetry has been published in *Dzinonyandura, Svinga Renduri* an anthology by 263, (Zimbabweans) set for 2016 -17 Advanced Level public examinations,) has taken to storytelling. She has contributed short



stories to *Munyori Literary Journal* for online dissemination. Her short stories, '*Zvipenga zvipenga*' and '*Zvibaye woga*' appear in the journal's Shona short fiction category battling for space with English language mediated national and international authors.

Mushayabasa, for instance, published online thrilling Shona stories which retain an aura of Zimbabweanness. There is an unfailing presents of a Zimbabwean story in her hyper-fiction. Digital revolution failed to actualise the immersion of the literariness of her short story to a form of hyper-mediatised or immersive reality. The Zimbabwean touch is retained by her skilful use of deep Karanga, a dialect of Shona language spoken in Masvingo province. In the story, '*Zvipenga Zvipenga*' Melvon tells the poverty stricken Svondo family about the death of their eldest son, Simba, who died in a South African xenophobic attack. Simba had joined the great trek down South to look for green pastures. His parents worry that Simba had never returned since his departure. Melvon, who is Lydia's fiancé, breaks the heart-breaking news by showing them Simba's Facebook profile picture and reading Simba's South African wife's message that she was looking for Simba's relatives to collect his corpse.

In another story, '*Zvibaye Woga*,' Mushayabasa is at best revealing a love triangle in which Medias, a married man, falls for Chipu, a school-days lover who had jilted him when she enrolled with University of Zimbabwe for an undergraduate programme. Medias had failed Advanced level and had to go to a primary teacher's college. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Chipu returns to her home area to teach English language. Exploiting the social media platform in the form of the WhatsApp application Chipu contacted Medias to revive their previous relationship. The extra marital affair culminated in the love-birds planning to spend a weekend together in Masvingo town. The Friday that Medias and Chipu had planned to go for their honeymoon turns very tense when Chipu sees Medias with his wife, Nyembesi, at the bus terminus.

Mushayabasa's awareness of the impact of digital mass media on human society and literature enables her to mediate on and investigate the ways in which new media functions. Aware of the risk of becoming a passive extension of the old, she circumvents the vagaries of new media influence by examining the media inside out. The subject of her new media

artwork is critiquing the way technology develops and creates new platforms, (as in ‘Zvipenga Zvipenga’) and/ or subverting (as in ‘Zvibaye woga’) people’s cultural harmony. In the first story the author, through Melvon’s attachment and manipulation of the phone’s social media, emphasises the need for radical transformation caused by new social media on human existence. Melvon tells the Svondo family of Simba’s death through the use of the Facebook application, which VaSvondo fails to conceptualise. He receives their money sent through the Econet facility. The new media has become part of humanity’s existence so that a strategy of selectiveness and alignment can be a recommended imperative in the use of new media. In a manner complementary of Mushayabasa, Obioha (2015:6) asserts, “No culture can claim absolute sufficiency. There is something every culture lacks but which it needs.” Thus the practice of cultural borrowing becomes necessary. Obioha cautions:

However, the process of cultural borrowing ... needs ... every society to have the right appetite guided by the rational needs of the society per time. The right appetite helps the culture to rationally select the right culture that conduces to their destinies and aspirations in the process of cultural diffusion and borrowing, (ibid: 6).

Though the old generation can hardly understand the new social media concepts such as Facebook and WhatsApp, they are not entirely detrimental to livelihood. Obioha, therefore, insinuates that instead of copying new media practices in totality, we can, rather do that with modification and innovation.

In the story, ‘Zvibaye woga’ the author reveals the negative side of new media. Medias’ hitherto sacrosanct cultural practices of extra marital relationship with Chipu, depicts nothing but irrationality. It constitutes a bane in the development of the family. Hence Medias and Chipu’s use of the WhatsApp application to rekindle their hitherto aborted affair is unattractive and destructive of the family unit. This is a cobweb that must be cleared to enable African people to come out of cultural ridicule and to contribute meaningfully to the quest for development of Africa.

Medias and Chipu have been acculturated by their Western education. Their acculturation is stimulated by the new media leading to individualised changes in their thinking and behaviour. Commenting on the impact of individualism, Cheng (2010:5) writes:

The convergence of new media and globalisation increase individual power in the new media society, which pluralises the world by recognising the ability and importance of individual component.

The new media develop virtual communities which allow individuals to gather and build online relationships. These relationships often produce different ways of media tendencies. In this story it reflects the asymmetry of social media communication eventually leading to the interpersonal confrontation between Medias, his wife, Nyembesi and his fiancée, Chipso.

In the context of these online literary productions, the question of canon formation presents an enduring and tormented debate. In so far as digital literature is extrinsically argued to breed fragmentation that switches conventional artistic grammar and cultural themes to new pattern of traditional cultural loss, creation of a canon of online short stories cannot unanimously be construed. The issue of the literariness of digital literature itself has been “expanded and made malleable (and) receptive to forms which older canonical ideas would have excluded,” (Carravetta, 2012:270). The controversy seeking redress is; from within what tradition and what kind of relationship is the canon built upon? This question elicits further critical explorations about the proper itinerary, aesthetic or otherwise and the view of the socio-cultural and historical purpose by which the canon can be authorised to claim resonance and viability.

Carravetta (2012:266) posits that a discussion of such a canon must “set in motion a methodology that accounts for the social and ideological position of the critic, the specificity of the text and the circumscribed environment in which they interact.” Cognisant of Kaschula’s (2014) oramedia theory of ‘Technauriture,’ the following exposition discusses how Zimbabwean digital short story writers circumvent these challenges to attain canonical autonomy. The idea is to make the inevitable censoring function of canon formation not an instrument of the inclusion and exclusion matrix, but rather “a compass for selected itineraries ever open to engage the texts which literally and metaphorically speak different language, manifest forms utterly new to us and compel a humbling self-critique,” (ibid: 270).

The accusation of electronic literature as overly filled with theoretical mumbo jumbo of avant-gardism and hybridity, accentuates that digital literature is not literary or literature at all. Its ascension to canonical literature remains questionable. Is there a canon for electronic

literature? This is the subject of the following discussion. Although the question of canonicity is controversial for electronic literature, the researcher insists that the rise of the internet and new media technologies help to accelerate digital short stories' acceptance into mainstream canon. Irrespective of the negative impact of new media on literature, the Zimbabwean digitally born short stories, in Shona, Ndebele and English, remain representative of typical Zimbabwean short fictional writings. Staunton, a publisher with Weaver Press, claims that over sixty per cent of their titles appear online as e-books. In an interview with the researcher, Staunton confides that the new media technologies do not take away the art's literariness. She retorts:

Most books about Zimbabwe are very Zimbabwean. Few titles strike that profound level of human experience that reaches beyond the particular, be it of culture or society. Petina Gappah is one of the few Zimbabwean authors who achieved this. Her characters are distinctively Zimbabwean, but they are also deeply human, and people all over the world can relate to their experiences. Tendai Huchu, with *The Hairdresser of Harare*, also reached a wide audience. Interestingly, both *Elegy for Easterly* and *The Hairdresser* make people laugh while tackling sensitive subjects. This is not insignificant. One does not always want to read pain, (Staunton, 2016, Interview, 17 March 2016).

Staunton implies that while it is true that the media influence the artistic expression, writers often do not confuse art with the medium. Instead, writers, as African/ Zimbabwean cultural innovators, seize upon the possibilities of the new media to revitalise their traditions. The imported digital media open windows into alternative lives, expand people's conceptions of the possible and enhance the role of imagination in social life. Thus, electronic literature as descendant of the bound print text adopted much from print. Its role as descendant of print literature does not impinge on the future of the print culture. Rather, digital technologies create exciting opportunities for print and electronic works to co-exist and see each of their brands of literature anew. A number of factors attest for the uniqueness, in canonical terms, of the Zimbabwean short story, whether oral, print or digital. The uniqueness is embedded in genre's originality, artistic creativity, tradition and culture of the people, Osho (2011).

### **5.3.2.1. Oramedia as factor for literariness of contemporaneity**

According to Alhassan (2015) Oramedia refer to cherished age-old African communication systems by which African people communicated and continue to communicate. Alhassan (2015:211) argues:

Through these systems, Africans had a socio-political, cultural and economic culture that had stood the test of time, despite the emergence of the modern media of mass communication. The African communication *modus operandi* was expressed through the media of ... oral tradition, the talking drum ... folk tales, riddles and narratives. ... Suffice to mention that the traditional media have survived from the earliest of times and made an adjusted transition into the electronic age. But this transition does not (or should not) undermine the tenets of African culture.

Alhassan implies that although oramedia forms have undergone changes due to mass media and new media influence, they, however, retained both their basic modes and significance. Alhassan develops from Akpabio's assumption of oramedia as

any form of indigenous communication system which by virtue of its origin forms and integrates into specific culture, serves as a channel for message in a way and manner that requires the utilisation of the values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes, Akpabio, (2003:2).

They are, therefore, a vehicle for the transformation and transmission of ideas, dogmas and philosophies of African societies as a handed down generational legacy. Oramedia or folk media, as a form of grounded indigenous culture, reinforces the values of a given African society. Despite the claim that the multiplicity of new media technologies have taken over Africa, oramedia continues to endure. The new multi-media technologies like the internet and the social media of Facebook and twitter, etc. are used in championing the uniqueness and richness of African culture.

Despite the emergence of new digital media the threat of globalisation and media imperialism the African short story still holds its Africanness and literariness in high esteem. As Osho (2011) posits, African oramedia subsist and are still relevant in contemporary African literature despite the looming threat of global villagisation. The electronic media "retribalised/ resocialised the world into a single global village by reducing the transmission of information by time and space," Osho (2011:2). The survival of African literature within

the global village concept conspicuously manifests in the “inevitable indispensability of the oral culture of oramedia which Africa continues to pride itself as inventor,” (ibid: 2). In disseminating her short stories online Mushayabasa utilises traditional African oramedia forms like language, dialect and other interactive or interpersonal non-verbal codifications to influence African cultural attitudes.

Mushayabasa uses the new media platform to represent herself in a uniquely Zimbabwean way and at the same time, manage to stay connected in cyberspace through an indigenous African language. The following passage demonstrates her use of Karanga dialect.

*Kwaingovawo zvako kuda kuti guyo gwairira mufoni make gupere, zvaaimonereka noruzhowa gwomusha waVaSvondo, kana Melvon aida kukasira kupinda mumusha umu aigona kupoya napakawanda chaizvo. Chero hazvo musha uyu wakanga wakashoshewa noruzhowa, wakanga wareruka zvikuru zvokuti zvipfuwo navasina matyira vakanga vava kuita madiro. Ruzhowa gwacho gwakanga gwashakara gwava namaburi-maburi nokushaiwa vanomutsa.* (Mushayabasa, Zvipenga Zvipenga, [www.munyori.org](http://www.munyori.org) accessed on 25 October 2016).

It was only to have the song that played in his phone to end that he went round the fence that surrounded VaSvondo homestead. If Melvon wanted to enter the homestead quickly, he could have entered on many openings that formed on the fence made of tree branches. Even if the home was fenced, it had been belittled by livestock and the irrespective people who invaded it willy-nilly. The fence was now outmoded and had numerous openings from lack of attention.

Mushayabasa develops a manner of linguistic articulation that enables her audience to sense the aesthetic taste of her work. Her language is not only a corpus of vocabularies devoid of thematic material and a synthesis of realities. Rather her strong Karanga accent is a social product and treasured possession of the people living in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. The context of her work can, then, be viewed and discussed in terms of a complex system of human relationship predicated on language. The language of the writer is not a:

...string of words just to provoke laughter and good sense of humour or to entertainment. Rather, it has a suggestive power beyond the immediate surface meaning. Thus the language ... through images, (dialect) and symbols gives a vivid picture of the world of (the writer's) society and the living beauty it has inherited from its forefathers, (Gemedo 2010:54).

Maseko and Ndlovu (2013) observe that globalisation of media and colonial legacies in Africa have universalised English Language as the preferred language of communication much to the detriment of local communities. Computers and the internet, like the colonial formal education system, have been introduced and disseminated as more or less monolingual media using English or another European language. In linguistic terms, stories in English

language have been touted not only as showing positive effects on the development of digital technology but also as increasing the degree of participation and intercultural communication competence (Osborn, 2006). The dominance of European languages reflects the domineering tendency of the former colonial hegemony over African and the third world countries in terms of information and communication technologies. Osborn (2006) argues that African languages are not being widely used in the context of computing application or the internet. African people use English, French or any other European language when using the new technology. This overwhelming influence of Western media models in shaping the content and programmes of African literature is a negation of ideals of African development. It retards the evolution of local African ideological direction. It challenges oramedia culture by fostering new communication culture of electronic age that “enslaves man on the website and internet,” (Osho, 2011:12). Osho further asserts:

It needs creative will for talented writers to look inwards and energise the traditional means of communication which has come to subsist with its unique values and effectiveness in the face of overbearing nature of mass media, new media and globalisation. (Osho, 2011: 12).

Online literary practitioners, such as Sigauke’s *Munyori literary Journal*, *KwaChirere* and *Mazwi Literary Magazine*, etc. draw from the oramedia literary tradition to redefine their concept of electronic literature. They use African culture and/ or languages as the method to reclaim the distinct African literary quality in terms of their (and readers’) sensibilities. For instance, Mushayabasa uses heavily accented Karanga, dialect of ChiShona, to awaken and strengthen the intensity of Zimbabwean cultural and social identity online. Indigenous African languages are so inextricably interconnected with culture that it is difficult to distinguish between these parameters. The use of African languages in both print and electronic media has the “added benefit of mainstreaming African culture,” (Maseko and Ndlovu 2013:151). Maseko and Ndlovu consider the imposition of foreign languages as tantamount to cultural violence and linguistic imperialism. Henceforth, the choice of African language and the use to which it is put are central to the “people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment,” (ibid: 151).

Reinforced here is the view that the use of new media may not change the authors’ or readers’ traditional meanings of cultural identity as unique products that give Zimbabweans their sense of belonging. Ngugi (1981) highlights the connection between language and

cultural identity. According to him, identity is the collective sense of sameness which people with shared history and ancestry hold in common. Language is a marker of identity common to members of a particular culture which simultaneously differentiates the group from others. Thus the use of African language in new media literary production holds the advantage of rendering African identities visible and competitive within the global context. In this light, Mushayabasa and fellow authors of online short stories use African languages as reference point for mitigating the “decentering effect of global identity discourse,” (Maseko and Ndlovu, 2013:151). They insist that:

Indigenous languages have the potential to include people who otherwise would have been left out of mainstream developmental agenda because of their limited command of the foreign, former colonial language, (ibid: 151).

Emphasising the imperative for utilising African languages in new media discourses, Mazrui (1999:26) captures the African problem as follows:

No country has ascended to a first rank technological and economic power by excessive dependence of foreign language. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialisation. Can Africa ever take off technologically if it remains so overwhelmingly dependent on European languages for discourses on advanced learning? Can Africa look to the future if it is not adequately sensitive to the cultural past? This lingo-cultural gap, then, is seen as a serious impediment to the full maturation of Africa’s own scientific genius. Against this backdrop, then, the need to scientificate African language cannot be over-emphasised.

Mazrui insinuates that the African continent remains historically, culturally and intellectually distorted and dominated by Western imperialist enterprise. The incorrect, slanted and deliberately dented account of Africa is a form of continued neo-colonial intellectual counterpart of colonial military conquest that marginalised and disparaged the cultural tradition of the original inhabitants of Africa. As a result of domination, the acculturated African prefers English and/ or other European languages because they give him a “sophisticated and globally savvy outlook,” (Maseko and Ndlovu, 2013:152). Thus, European language consumption is taken as signifying education and socio-cultural mobility.

Hence the visibility of African languages on electronic literature remedies the cultural and linguistic imperialism that threatens African cultural and linguistic outlook. The e-stories’ frame of reference is so exclusively local that they can be treasured as influential in



reclamation of African cultural identity, especially those disseminated in their culture and language of their origin.

#### **5.3.2.2. The Africultural character of the e-short story**

Short stories, whether oral, written or digital, are embedded in the cultural values and traditional practices of the people. African people grew up with storytelling over generations and got accustomed to it in their day to day interactions. Storytelling is bound to be with people till eternity. The proliferation of the short story on the web and internet explains a teleological mutation of the genre from its traditional oral form through the written to, ultimately, digital. This metamorphosis obtains from the people's history that has often changed due to processes -such as slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and ultimately globalisation. The former colonial master wishes to continue to dictate not only the political and economic affairs of Africa but also the socio-cultural action of the people as well. The World Wide Web, controlled by the United States of America, (Osho, 2011) aims to perpetuate its imperialist hegemony over Africa and third world countries through control of world information. The entire world "is caged, imprisoned and entrapped in the nuances of internet and computers in the global village" through subscription to the internet facilities through America only, (Ibid: 9). This new communication age aims to change people's culture into 'new culture' of electronic communication and American popular culture via "new languages, new techniques and new psychology," (ibid: 9). The former colonialist overlords consciously use technical and technological schemes especially, the radio, television, internet and social networking technologies as strategies for preserving the continued dependence on their 'cherished' values and ideological inclination in their former colonies. Uche, (1991) considers the internet and new communication media as the former overlords' means of scaling down the culture, language and experience of Africans.

The consequence of African experience in foreign domination, servitude, exploitation and the diffusion of various foreign dominant cultural values have culminated in such contemporary issues as ... continued lack of ideological base from which to develop a cultural policy base for the mass media industry of the various national communication systems in which the African continent easily makes Africa and its home media audience captives and victims of the dominant cultural values of the media of the core countries. ... As Africa continues to depend on external media

imports for communication, entertainment, the culture of its various nations are continually being eclipsed by external cultural influences due to wholesale dependence in foreign media, (Uche, 1991:3).

These media quandaries are a reflection of the local need for evolving means for African ideological directions. Technological innovations from the 1980s onwards have been pivotal in providing alternatives to the conventions of oral and print media narratives. According to them, increased access to and usage of the internet influenced the creation and reception of African narratives within the new media. Forthwith, the writers' ability to harness the textual resources and networking World Wide Web capabilities has proliferated storytelling communities. The wider context of social networking sites provides platforms for writers to narrate their African experiences on blogs, journals and other online discussion boards, precisely because storytelling is a culturally accumulated African experience. In socio-cultural terms storytelling serves as image forming reference through which a system of Africultural order takes place, whereby new media concepts systematically relate and interconnect. Thus storytelling fundamentally unfolds African culture-oriented ideas about realities and mankind.

This researcher blended the terms, African and culture, neologising *africulture* to designate oramedia forms such as storytelling, dancing, folk songs, drama, mime groups and traditional attire that are highly effective cultural artefacts. Their interactive and inter-personal nature, which combines both verbal and non-verbal codifications, allows immediate feedback and collaboration. As the online repertoire of communicative forums widen to include blogs, wikis and social networking sites, the central role of communication practices embedded in *Africultural* traditions come to the foyer. The survival, continuity and relevance of electronic literature in general, and electronic short story in particular, is linked to the empirical reality of the social structures "in which the lore of the people functions as vehicle for transmission of values" that facilitate smooth and effective social interaction.

As the researcher consents, African literature, (irrespective of its oral, print or electronic variations) is not produced in a vacuum. It is a product of the search for socio-cultural and historical relevance. As such the electronic version of the short story, as much as its oral and written counterparts, lives a narrative life, neither on page nor cybernetic screen. The art of

storytelling forms part of the communicative situation wherein the narrator/ author transmits his/ her salient message to his/ her envisioned audience/ reader. Irrespective of the oral, print and electronic dichotomies, the audience/ reader forms the counterpart of the implied narrator. Thus, the transformation of storytelling to modern digital technological literary genre has been necessitated by the effective relationship between the implied narrator and reader. The reliability of online literature, therefore, depends on similarities between the ideology of the narrator and the ideology of the reader/ audience. Herman (2005:20) augments this view by asserting, “The most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader can find complete agreement.” By implication perpetual development of e-literature depends on the perfect social setting in which the author, as producer, and the reader, as consumer, share common interests and outlooks. According to Muwati, it is part of the process of revolutionising literature. He responds during an interview:

The reading culture has certainly changed in Zimbabwe. The current generation of young people is no longer interested in attending to voluminous pieces. In addition, it is part of revolutionising literature. Just look at what is now happening in film – those two minute comedies. That is what the young are comfortable with. The reading culture and reading patterns have certainly changed.

Muwati refers to the ceaseless mutation of readers’ experiences in the wake of digital technologies vis-à-vis their historical literary conception based essentially on text-centric expressive systems. The mutagenicity that occurs among deferent semiotic textual systems should be considered in a wider system mediated by the new media, which indicates that something new has powerfully entered literature. Digital evolution revolutionises literature in a cultural system historically defined by precise rules and boundaries.

However, e-literature cannot be completely untied from its past literary tradition, since technologies have drawn from print literary traditions to redefine the concept of literature itself. Obiechina (1975) argues that since African literature is a product of African culture it may be perceived as a mirror through which the entire image of human relations is projected. By the same token, storytelling, as an accumulated patrimony of centuries of creativity, is a vehicle of cultural inheritance and social transformation which is transmitted through “direct contact between individuals ... depending largely on memory and habits of thoughts, actions and speech for cultural continuity,” (Obiechina 1975:32). What is implied here is that

storytelling as an oral literary genre is a surviving artistic work of generations that plays a significant role in the lives of African. Modern civilisation and technological advancement give values to this treasured literary culture. Hence, the growth of online short storytelling increases the imaginative capacity of the narrators to enter into new creative world of discovery that awakens new aspirations and nourishes their natural talents.

The idea of aficulture, which Ngugi (1986) regards as oral tradition, is rich and multifaceted. He inscribes:

The art did not end yesterday; it is a living tradition. ... Familiarity with oral literature could suggest new structures and techniques and could foster attitudes of mind characterised by the willingness to experiment with new forms. ... By discovering and proclaiming loyalty to indigenous values, the new literature would, on one hand be set in the stream of history to which it belongs and so be better appreciated and on the other hand, be better able to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots, (Ngugi, 1986:94-5).

In order to value the quality of online literature as canonical, literary art requires one to assess whether or not the literature in question has contemporary relevance, suits modern consciousness and/ or address outstanding issues of the present milieu. Unless appreciated within the changing attitudes of the society which generated it, ascertaining proper canonical judgement about e-literature could be impossible. Thus, a critical breadth of canonicity of digital literature should concern less with the stylistic or textual characteristics of new media narrative forms than with socio-cultural formations that produce and consume them. Suspicious of both technological determinism and crude progressionism in appreciating the canonical value of digital literature, this discussion locates its thesis on the broader debates surrounding globalisation and cultural imperialism. It desists from celebrating the transgressive potentials of new media subcultures in the direction of hybridisation but, rather, in terms of binary apposition of mainstream versus margin or orthodox versus heterodox. Ideas generated from the study of how short story narrative discourses of everyday interactions throw light on the context of online stories.

Thus, Sigauke, Huchu and Mushayabasa's electronic short stories, (alluded to above in this section) embody African cultural and aesthetic values of the contemporary society. They mirror the societal history and offer a projective screen that illuminates its lofty dreams,

aspirations and fears. The survival of these online short stories, their continuity and success depends on their reasonably satisfying intellectual interests, social-cultural, political and economic realities of the present society. The argument for their canonical acceptance lies in their full power of continuous memory in processing creative accounts of events, situations and transmission of cultural values and norms. Continued innovation in narrative practice challenges profound ways in which digital literary forms can be theorised. Questions about the distinctiveness and effectiveness, in canonical terms, of digital literary forms owe much to the cultural use to which it may be put.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The discussion has, so far, shown that the ascension of the Zimbabwean electronic short story, as “texts on screen,” (Wend 200:1) remains questionable. It has raised serious contentious matters of canonical relevance. Critical controversies abound on whether electronic literature is literature at all. The on-going discussion explores whether or not there is a canon for digital short story. Hence, the most controversial debate about globalisation and new media technology, vis-à-vis African literary canon in general and short story canon in particular, has to do with the rise of global culture, which Kwame (2007:3) regards as a “culture ideology of consumerism.” This global culture concept is driven by symbolic images and aesthetics of the lifestyles of Western civilisation that spreads throughout the world. The globalising culture is touted as bearing momentous effects to “standardisation of tastes and desires,” (ibid: 3). Carravetta (2012:265) asserts that the fierce battle of canonicity stems from the idea that globalising cultures “tend to become authoritative.” They inscribe their protocols and rationalise “systems of imperfect egalitarian justice and participatory representation” Kwame (2007:4) in the literary culture and social interactions of African identity, ultimately rendering itself a homogenising process. The notion of the literary itself has been argued to have been made more malleable and receptive of digital forms which existing African literary canon would not accept.

As discussed above, the process of globalisation and the influence of new media are not new to Africa. Africa’s history of international contacts and exchanges that spans centuries pities

the periods of Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, era of colonialism, era of independence and neo-colonialism. Throughout these periods of upheavals, African critics, writers and readers realised that contact with the West has neither been a value free nor an innocent process. Henceforth, the Africans resisted the vicissitudes of Western asceticism by annexing the globalising processes and technological advancement into their own practices in order to maintain their African cultural identity. The consumption of the mass media provokes resistance and selectivity so that the African literary cultures and values “change over time in path dependent rather than convergent ways,” (Kwame 2007:3.) The digital short stories demonstrate the same reality that African literary culture is not an abstraction.

It is a living open totality that evolves by constantly integrating individual and collective choices that are taken in interaction with other similar wholes. It expresses itself in diverse ways without being reducible to works (of apemanship). African culture is the product of a complex inheritance constantly submitted to scrutiny and the need to adapt a constant conquest to achieve, (Kwame 2007:4)

In spite of the rapid and aggressive influence of Western market economies and communication technologies on local cultures and values, Zimbabwean online writers such as Mushayabasa cultivate alternatives to resist global and technological persuasions. Mushayabasa’s short stories, for instance, prove that despite the pervasive symbolic power of new media, African writers, critics and readers retain a measure of autonomy not only to change/ recondition their minds in relation to the desires of the powerful, but also in participating in the use of the multimedia messages. Such forms of resistance signal crucial modes of counter-power that makes the African literary and cultural sensibilities perpetually African.

The counter-power authenticates the canonical value of African/ Zimbabwean short story, whether orally, print or digitally disseminated. Just as the oral short story achieves canonical relevance, so does the print and the digitally mediated genres. As cultural representations, the short stories bear stamps of African cultural and historical moment. Irrespective of the medium, they are African culturally and historically contingent. Hestetun (2008:44) consents:

Since literary texts are culturally produced, they produce culture. Narrative constitutes in itself a mode in which humans make an effort to understand and interpret the world and human conditions.

By implication, Hestetun insinuates that if literary texts are cultural products, they preserve the imprints of their cultural origin and are, therefore, conditioned by African conception of time and place. It follows, then, that the study of any African literature, oral, written or digital, involves a study of the African culture. The online short stories' literary conventions are culturally contingent. Since the reading of these short stories, irrespective of the medium of dissemination, brings into play the cultural horizon of African origin, their canonical relevance cannot be overemphasised. The process of configuring a short story, (through narration) is a sense-making process of attributing canonical value to it, whatever the medium. It is worthwhile to espouse Zimbabwean online short stories as canonically contingent. The study of digital short stories reflects topical issues and themes of contemporary relevance.

The problematic issue of canonicity of the short story genre is not only exclusion from the mainstream canon, but also the canonists' tendency of narrowing understanding of what an African/Zimbabwean short story is. The short story genre, in general, belongs to a more transient category. It is usually absent from critical studies because it disappears from view as soon as it is published. No wonder why most studies devoted to the short story begin by observing its chronic neglect. However, its unprecedented proliferation during the last decade, both in print and digital forms, makes it increasingly difficult to uphold the claim of its neglect.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

*Careful examination is required of the use of the past in the work of canonisation, since the evocation of past cultural assets does not always mean consolidation of existing canons. Often, this act can serve, more sophisticatedly, as means of revolutionising a given field and constructing a new canon, by claiming to have a hold, in the name of “authenticity”, of a most genuine version and ultimate interpretation of an old canonical reservoir, (Rakefet, 2002:148).*

### 6.0 Introduction

The previous chapters assumed Afrocentric-cum-Technauriture theoretical approaches towards a full integration of socio-cultural and historical aspects of canonicity. They explored how the processes of literary canon formation aide our understanding of the marginal nature of the African/Zimbabwean short story canon. Canonicity, as one of the emblematic notions of contemporary African literature, has been argued as presenting a controversial stratagem in short story critical scholarship. Viewed as the recurrent hermeneutics of suspicion, canonicity creates space for cultural conflict where various pedagogical and cultural groups debate why the short story canon is as marginal as it is, “how it was formulated and how circumstances can alter or condition its supposedly timeless content,” (Wilczek, 2012:1687). This present chapter sums up the research findings and lends support to observations presented in Chapters Four and Five. It also points towards new directions to which the results of this research can be useful in future research themes needing and/or wanting exploration.

### 6.1. Research findings and observations.

This study has revealed that the literary canon studied, theorised and critiqued as African/Zimbabwean literature is never exhaustive. A sizable subset of genres, works or authors considered to be official in the African literary canon, in fact, represents a mere constituent. This sets a fixed perception and limiting comprehension of African literary canon, in general and the Zimbabwean short story canon, in particular. What is studied in schools, colleges and universities as official Zimbabwean prose/fiction canon is, in effect, a selective canon that has been reified as formal curricula and whose pedagogical, cultural and ideological influences had long been recognised and authenticated by the canonising



institutional powers. The presumed official canon has been institutionalised through pedagogic, ideological and political patronage. The lengthy novel is regarded, *prima facie*, as more canonical than the short story. Thus, according to Flower (1979:100) the epic, as the precursor to the novel, ruled up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the best of all genres in European narrative tradition. The novel, as the most representative canonical discourse, has been perceived as setting the trend of African/Zimbabwean Literature. Hence, owing to its generic hegemony within the African literary canon, the African novel is perceived as the most direct representation of pedagogic, cultural, ideological and political potentials.

The research has also argued that the Zimbabwean short story documents a patent case of creativity without canonical visibility within the academy. The University of Zimbabwe, which is the architect of the national literature studied across academic institutions, presents a racialised literary canon whose trajectory maps juxtaposed routes in which literature in English is in collocation with indigenous African literary tradition. The deployment of the hierarchical apposition of English and indigenous language literatures casts a long shadow over the denigration of the short story in relation to the novel. The University of Zimbabwe's Department of English prides itself as the privileged medium ascending the African literary presence on the arena of international literary and cultural exchange. Literary representation, exclusively through the medium of the novel, is exhibited as an avenue for showcasing this differential exclusionary colonial canon formation, restricted to a small sect of the population of the intellectuals. Even though the critics within English Departments of Zimbabwean literature adopt a somewhat positivist approach that defines the short story as a distinct literary form, the short genre's state of subalternity is underscored by their insistence that the short story is an interim form of literary expression, and an appendage of the novel. Thus the genre is accorded some space within canon's hierarchical power structure "narrowly limited to maintain a pretentious but necessary elitism" (Bona and Maimi, 2006:10) that gives a sense of canonical order.

On the other hand, leading critics of Zimbabwean languages literature, Shona and Ndebele, register a peculiar institutionalised aversion of the short story. University departments of indigenous African language literature uphold that the novel, as prototype, retains the highest degree of resemblance useful for interpretation of socio-historical and cultural

epistemological aesthetics. Where short stories feature in their critical endeavours these critics locate a network of relationships that integrates the short story analysis with that of the novel to deliberately ignore the distinctiveness of its form. Unlike in English mediated literature where the short story has been explored as a relativised canon (with its own moral, social and aesthetic dimension relativised to the novel's) critics in the indigenous African languages traditions have been far less willing to write and theorise about the short story. There is no exact stand-point regarding the value of the short story within African languages literature. It is difficult to find an Edgar Allan Poe-like figure to advocate for the kind of cultural aesthetics or unified effect commissioned by the short genre.

These disparate positions, perpetuated by indigenous African and English literary traditions, produce a narrowing focus on the short story corpus and are, therefore, elitist. The Zimbabwean short story, whether mediated in English or any of the indigenous African languages, belongs to a more transient category, as evidenced by its conspicuous absence from critical studies. This overwrites the genre ephemerality, since the short story disappears from view almost as soon as it is published. The few studies devoted to the short story begin by observing that the genre is a chronically neglected canon. Critical attention given to the novel and authors of higher social standing take the short story for granted, perceiving it as supplementing the well-known authors' long prose oeuvres which critics take as representative of exemplary literary trends. The problem is not only the absence of critical attention but the critics' extreme heterogeneity of approach that excludes the marginal short story from the canon by dint of the critics' narrow understanding of what Zimbabwean short story is capable of achieving pedagogically and socio-culturally.

The ambivalence of the short story canon is further exacerbated by its unprecedented proliferation, (especially in English medium,) within the contemporary dispensation of globalisation, multi-media and digital technologies which tend to favour short fiction as a medium of its expression. This upsurge presents new challenges to the inconsistencies of existing literary canons. The response from Zimbabwean universities and collegiate institutions, vis-à-vis the upsurge, has been a phenomenon that can best be explained in terms of what West (1987:196) regards as "ideologies of pluralism." Some institutions, such as Solusi University and Great Zimbabwe Universities, accommodate and/or integrate the short

story in their canon of African/Zimbabwean literature in order to overcome the incommensurability of the short story discourse, thereby avoiding and mediating clashing perspectives in structurally fragmented novel/short story dichotomies. Their notion of prose literature has been expanded to be malleable and receptive to forms which mainstream canon would not have excluded. The logic behind the synthesis is to render the inevitably censoring function of canon formation not a tool for literary ideologies of inclusion and exclusion, but a compass for selected itineraries to always be open to engage marginalised texts so as to compel a more varied critique.

The key players in the liminal canonical condition of the African/Zimbabwean short story have been argued to be based on the differential economic and ideological power between the Western Europe/North America as the 'core' block and Africa and the rest of the literary world as 'periphery.' The history of African literature is replete with discourses of patronage that Chapter Four discusses as multifactorial valences of canonicity. Brown's (2010) taxonomy has been utilised to organise these factors into two categories; extrinsic factors (situated beyond the literary text) and intrinsic properties of the literary work itself. As discussed, the short story canonical marginality is not a natural process but one fully exposed to power struggles. An array of external institutions and social agents (more than intrinsic factors) compete for educational monopoly over literary representation, thus eventually marginalising short fiction. These interlaced factors operate simultaneously in a dynamic relationship that makes the boundaries between them less distinct. The chapter observed as risk the tendency of emphasizing one aspect of the classification system over others since it often takes more than one factor for a literary text to ascend to a sanctioned list.

Intrinsic factors of canonicity relate to the impact of the literary text itself on pedagogical practices. The effectiveness of the text is determined by its place within literary practice as well as the usefulness of its content. Conflicting aesthetic systems dominate theorisation of the short story genre, in the process, influencing its fluid acceptance in the literary canon. Thus, for a text to ascend to a sanctioned list, in Afrocentric theoretical scholarship, it has to satisfy the concern for African rootedness. The philosophy emphasises thematic constructions that underscore issues of African identity, regeneration of African consciousness and centrality of African culturalism as criteria for selecting fictional texts. Selective focus on

themes and ‘tendencies,’ forecloses any consideration of artistic form in fiction. Hence, mindless celebration of differences of form, between the novel and short story for its own sake, does not work, especially for indigenous African languages mediated literature. However, their pitfall lies in identifying the novel as the privileged medium for the assertion of an African literary presence on the international artistic and cultural arena. On the other hand, in Anglophone African literary traditions, literary critical theories of the invented ‘post,’ (post-colonialism, post-coloniality, post structuralism and their cronies) are advanced to analyse short fiction as a perpetually appended interim form of the novel masterpiece. The valorisation of length as salient feature of the narrative form makes the short plot a very unpopular convention. The assumption being that no serious reader could opt for an author in apprentice. Whatever and whichever theory is adopted for analysing the short story corpus considers the novel and short story canons as asymmetric. African critics are non-Catholic about the definition of genres.

The marginal nature of the short story canon is further compromised by its dependence on various external intermediaries such as colonially originated Literature Bureaux, publishers, educationalists, reviewers and readers, “who are always present as agents enforcing a zero sum exchange of literary value,” of the short genre from the periphery to the centre, (Barnet, 2006:6). The Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau has been discussed as perpetuating continuity of the relation of patronage between colonial and post-independence indigenous fictional writing. The Bureau enforced a contractual partnership with publishers, such as Mambo Press and College Press, to only publish manuscripts that it had approved. Hence, the missionary presses and colonial publishing institutions operated as directive and invasive as the Bureau in perpetuating a racialised and hierarchical collocation of the novel/ short story. The greatest deterrent to decolonising the literary curriculum lies in the perpetuation of “unequal exchange of the historical legacy of colonialism,” (Okolo, 2007:87) that subordinates the relationship of the West as ‘core’ and African as ‘other.’ Political independence failed to reverse the complexity of the machinery of the colonial enterprise that extends beyond the political chambers to influence artistic sensibilities and intellectual configurations as well. The colonial instruments of conquest of African textuality operated a twofold manifestation within Zimbabwean literary and intellectual realm. On the one hand the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau (SRLB) served the purpose of moderating the outlook of indigenous African languages literature and conditioning the presentation of

Shona and Ndebele imaginative creative genres. A hostile reaction and indifference towards the short story typifies the recurrent tension between African cultural values and the Bureau's ostensibly apolitical universal appeal for literary aesthetics. On the other hand, colonial education had presented its African beneficiaries "with the first motivated representation of their (European) collective image" the acquisition of which was designed to initiate apemanship in the subjects, (Okunoye, 2004:157). Thus African literature's record disinterest and inertia towards short fiction is a function of predisposed continuity of colonial legacy perpetuated through the machinery of colonial enterprise. The deliberate inclusion of English classics in colonial curricula of African education functions to propagate Western cultural images which the African was supposed to legitimate as 'cultural capital.'

The Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau and its surrogate publishers performed a certain type of ideological task of reproducing "pre-existing set of relations of appropriation, dependence and extraversion whose history stretches back to colonialism," (Barnet, 2006:5). Publishers, as agents, designed, produced and marketed the indigenous African novel according to the Bureau's specified didactic imperatives understood to bear a representative function in relation to African livelihood. The novels, then, were read as traces of the institutional intentions shaping what can be publicly read, judged and evaluated as Zimbabwean literature. Hence, in the process of canonisation, the role played by the SRLB and publishers was not one of inclusion and exclusion but a process of selection by reference to explicit criteria, as earlier discussed.

The selection process involved the enduring negotiations of different criteria adopted by educational actors and pundits. Since the central criterion of this selection was that fiction books should have a chance for being prescribed by examination boards, the canonical acceptance of the short story was compromised due to the relative position of the authorities and institutions that controlled production, diffusion and evaluation of literary mechanisms. University lecturers and professors endowed with the power to consecrate and reproduce 'legitimate' canons formed the benchmark upon which texts came to be judged. Professors, who possess a wealth of academic resources, determine the selection of texts and authors for curriculum design and teaching content. Chiwome and Mguni (2012) argue that some literary works get the support of educational institutions through being prescribed for study in

schools, colleges and universities while others do not. For them, learning institutions present literary canon as a site of struggle where recycled colonial images of domination are reproduced.

Lauter (1983) considers professionalisation of the teaching of literature as well as development of literary theories as instrumental factors influencing institutional recognition of certain texts over others. He holds that professional specialisation contributes to the institutionalisation of academic reading choices. What had been the function of the museum, art galleries, publishing houses, literary clubs and magazines has become the purview of the classroom at the discretion of the professors. For Brown (2010:540,) intellectuals within a faculty of an academic unit represent a “multi-dimensional lattice work of symbolic value” for theorising institutional and cultural superstructures of resident canon. Regardless of its estimated socio-historical and cultural importance, nothing can be done until canon-makers adopt institutional measures to ensure official recognition of the short story.

The discussion of the dialectics of publication, marketing and literary prizes crystallises all discussed factors as the most crucial canon-forming mechanism. The study showed that in publishing as in any business, marketing and literary prizes are inseparable aspects of enhanced promotion and distribution of the literary text. As commercial heritage the literary text has a commodity function since it is a material product of the publisher as much as it is of the artist. The major publishing outlets of indigenous languages literature, Mambo Press, The College Press and Longman Zimbabwe, received hefty subsidies from then Rhodesia literature Bureau for publishing partisan literature. The lure of literary prizes, coupled by literary workshops, turned literary creativity into eccentric narrative idiolect, in which the African novel exclusively opened economic opportunities for both the writer and publisher. The short story was held back by either the publishers who would not want to invest in non-marketable short fiction or by the writers themselves, who had realised commercial opportunities the novel would offer irrespective of its ideological predilections.

Even now, decades after independence, literary prize’s penchant for rewarding fiction “...replicates older historical forms of cultural imperialism. It implies a condition of

contradiction between anti-colonial ideologies and neo-colonial market schemes,” (Hestetun, 2008:130). Hestetun implies that the recent times are experiencing an intense politics of literary merit. The prestige linked to literary prizes’ economic value has become more subservient to garnering ostentatious international recognition. The system of literary awards, therefore, has become an evaluative and value generating mechanism argued to be one of most effective criteria for systematising and classifying literary canons, after literary criticism.

Paradoxically, the conferment of literary awards to contemporary fiction has highlighted and appreciated the reception of authors and their short story works. The high profile reached by literary prizes such as the Caine Prize confers the status of literary worth and merit to the short story genre. In Zimbabwe, Weaver Press emerged in 1999 to give writers the much needed fill-up and AmaBooks cropped up a year later to achieve a similar feat. The inception of these private publishers coincided with the emergence of a new writing phenomenon, short story writing, that had developed in response to the writers’ restless energy and creative fermentation that the international Caine Prize literary support initiated, yielding to the contemporary literary renaissance. The Caine Prize hogs a libertarian appraisal of the creative entrepreneur by instigating a capitalist mentality that rewards creative artistic achievement thereby prostituting the artists into becoming commercial surrogate of the publisher and his prize culture.

Apart from the above factors, this study discussed the instrumentality of new media and digital technologies in availing literary texts and genres for canon selection. Thus, the vicissitudes of media technologies are changing the modes of literary production and genre preferment. The short story genre is not immune to processes of commercialisation and industrialisation bestowed by the changing media. Online literary blogs and magazines feature short stories in both indigenous African and English languages. Sigauke, Chirere and Mushakavanhu, for instance, run online Magazines very instrumental in promoting the short story writing. They network a wider general readership traditionally restricted to the classroom by the paucity of academic resource and cultural capital. The easily accessible online short story fits the psychological need of the readers, even outside the classroom. Technologies, ideologies and cultures have, therefore, been linked to canon formation

throughout the history of mankind. Canon makers, academics in humanities, writers and readers are cautious about new media technology as well as online scholarship.

The general critical claim of this study is that the politics of genres has attracted a critical soul searching debate. The key question rests upon whether or not the narrative rhythm, form and texture of the short story can be adequately transcribed into the rhythm, form and texture of the African literary canon. More specifically, the literary canon has particularly been associated with the predominance of a particular prose style, the novelistic discourse. The novel, as literary canon's dominant aesthetic tool, eschews the short story genre as constituting a taken-for-granted canon. The canon obtaining thereof, characterises a subversion of African cultural domination in African writing. This subversion creates a retrogressive discourse that celebrates the experience of 'privileged' imperialist canon, ultimately contributing towards the marginal reception of the short story tradition which culminated in an emaciated African literary canon. The existing canon that extols the autonomy of the novel has been argued throughout the study as bearing a distinctively imperialist mimetic burden of canonical representation of African writing. The selective focus on the African novel as exclusively representative of the canon of African prose can be accused of being complicit with colonial structures of inequality.

### **6.3. Summary of recommendations**

After dissecting the deficiencies of the existing literary canon, what serves well as a model for future research is to propound some recommendations towards a full integration of the socio-cultural and historical aspects of African/Zimbabwean literary canon formation. Owing to pedagogic stampede, the short story canon is controversially marginal. Multiple and often antithetical interpretations of literary canon create disputes about the meaning, implications and usefulness of texts and genres. The multiplicity of interpretations pulls and shifts the shape of canon in multiple directions, thereby, generating several splintered, anti- or extra-canonical marginal textualities. This study suggests ways that account for social, cultural and ideological repositioning of the disequilibrium and multiple directions.



The foremost reflection for stabilising the short story canon is to consider literary artefacts in terms of their axiological aspects of production, thematic depth, (innovativeness,) aesthetic over-structuring as well as semiotic interplay and reception. According to Grishakova, (2004), the semantics of the word ‘canon’ provokes different readings and multiple definitions. The term, ‘canon,’ defines a ‘rule,’ ‘measure’ or ‘standard’ for conventional view of texts, designed by the professional community (of literary critics, lecturers, editors, reviewers, etc.) that sanctions, interprets and teaches secular literature. Canon refers either to rule, (model) or to a set, (selection) of authoritative texts. The term suggests permanence as a “characteristic of quality literature that adheres to an objective and relatively unchanging measurement or standard,” (Meadows, 2006:52). This creates an impression of the existence of a list of authors and works that remains relatively stable over centuries. The sense of permanence and stability suggests that the authors and works have become part of the canon which the readers presume to have relatively been fixed.

The present study, however, argues that canon formation should not be perceived as a fixed/permanent form that cannot be developed from an unchanging standard. Instead, the literary canon should be in constant flux to achieve equilibrium of canonical representation. Notwithstanding canon controversies, the current study upholds the view that canon reform is peremptorily necessary to serve as a homogenising or revolutionising force in the absence of a unifying stance on the canonicity of short story genre. The perception that canon serves as a ‘measure’ or instrument of education, that limits or facilitates admission to the mainstream curriculum, renders canon a popular but erroneous etymology. Friedmann (1996) suggests that for any canon reform to be successful, students also need to be involved in the controversies surrounding the definitions of canon. Bringing the debate into the classroom by teaching it neutralises in-fighting amongst professionals whose odd positions may not consider the change in the culture of the students. This study maintains that expanding the canon to include the short story corpus does not blaze trail into new or alien literary territory. It actually takes notice of marginalised literary types moving towards visibility in the historical development of African literary canon. The short story text does not change or diminish the nature of the discourse of African literature, but rather, enriches it, since the question of access to the canon is not decided on the level of the reading list but on the approaches employed to come up with the reading lists.

The current thesis concurs with Benton (2000) that canon formation is an expression of institutional political power. Canon debates at collegiate institutions and universities are arguments about power over who controls the curriculum. Not the literary types which are left out of the canon are marginal, but that the canon itself is a field defined by powerful and authoritarian academic pundits. What is marginal to them is only marginal in respect of their activity, an attestation of what Friedmann considers “a progressive rarefication of a discourse about literature access to which is highly selective,” (Friedmann, 1996:8). Institutions of canon, therefore, can be seen as veritable incarnation of power and authority. The canonical marginality of short story is a problem of educational monopoly or institutional practices that underlie the canon. The conspicuous absence of the short genre in the history of African literature overgrows this narrow political framework where certain genres, like the novel, are considered to be of higher value and more appropriate in the medium of African writing. This confirms the eighteenth/nineteenth century imperialist power differentiation which served to assert male dominance in literature. The short story denigration embraces the complicated superiority complex that marginalises the few genres to which women had access. The power-that-be valorised a canon pre-selected by their culture and laid down like fossils in the sedimented layers of institutional tradition.

Despite the pervasive symbolic power of the institutions, the short story literary type retains a measure of canonical autonomy and independence to engage more or less actively in the African/Zimbabwean literary canon formation. In other words, whatever symbolic power of the institutions, the short genre is able to resist such persuasions.

Literary canon is as much a social construct as it is cultural. Instead of perceiving canon as a fixed form, canon formation should be seen as a process of revaluation of particular authors which “alters the set or terms by which literature as a whole, or what we like to call the canon, is represented to its constituency, to literary culture, at a particular historical moment,” (Guillory, 1993:135). In tandem with Guillory, this study admits that canon is always an image of the culture. As cultural construct, canon is a register of how our socio-cultural and historical self-understanding are formed and modified. These modifications are bi-directional. On one hand, literature changes our perception of ourselves and on the other, the change in culture works to change our perception of the literary canon. The short story canon needs to

be studied as socio-cultural construct. The short story has a rational cultural basis, an ideology that assumes a dominant cultural nature and value of authentic African culture. While some critics may challenge the extrapolation of the genre's value, few critics demur that it is a cultural construct. Hence, as cultural representation, the short story bears the stamp of African cultural history. This study popularised the term *Africulture* to designate that short story is African culturally contingent. Since it is culturally produced the short story subsists in the culture of story-telling. Denying the genre canonical representation is denying the genre the cultural horizon of its origin. Socrates' maxim that an unexamined literary tradition is not worth living, implies that the short story form of narrative serves the task of examining and exploring the life worth living. Commenting on narrative continuity, Hestetun (2008:46) posits that a "society where narrative is dead is one where men are no longer capable of exchanging their experiences, of sharing a common experience." Thus the present study's quest for the short story narrative continuity is not a mere nostalgic escapism. It cherishes the view that giving memory back to the people is giving back a future to them. That future is guaranteed precisely by the possession of story-telling identity that is authentically Zimbabwean. Thus, the narrative constitutes a fundamental human activity that serves to create an existential meaning. That narrative is not generated out of nothing but is produced by culture. The Africultural praxis inscribes story-telling as embedded in myths, stories, assumptions, norms and values of African cultural world view. The referent of story-telling to culture is not an empty enterprise but an action that has been re-symbolised over centuries. The essence of existence is intimately linked to a "shared imaginaire," a common symbolic heritage which Ricoeur (1984:36) considers as "the imaginary nucleus of any culture."

Consequently, Africultural praxis as a theoretical and methodological framework comes into play to pose the right questions for canon formation. Within the realm of Africultural paradigm, especially within the broader understanding of literary canon, the African novel and the short story have equal chances of canonical representation. A unitary model of the canon is neither necessary exclusive nor immutable. As discussed in Chapter Two about the 1962 Makerere Conference on African literature, the debate about African literature has been inextricably bound up with the development of the literary canon. The contention of the current thesis is that 1960s canon organisers of African Literature set up immutable criteria that stifled efforts to authenticate the short story as a serious academic discipline. The admission of the short story into the canon should be determined in the same way that the

novel, drama and poetry were admitted, upon the same test of literary quality designed, administered and selected by the Makerere gurus of African literature. The exclusive attitude that denied the short story access to the pantheon renders the existing canon a unitary model. The unitary model has always been vulnerable to charges of elitism and paternalism that carry with them the colonial feeling of literary patronage.

If we do not reform the canon to accommodate marginalised genres such as short story, we risk sparing the canon some essential criticism and leave its pedagogy in the hands of those who teach it selectively. This deprives not only the students of the prestige associated with knowledge of these genres but also neglects the genres' search for a resisting voice as counter-canon. The denial idealises existing canons, in the process, ceding to "ultra-conservatives" the claim that the African literary canon replicates a "homogeneous monolithic Western culture," (Guillory, 1993:47). It is against this background that this study proposes canon reformation as the alternative process by which prevailing canonical subjectivities are truncated. Thus canon reform enables the short story genre to be officially canonised in order to negotiate the transgressions of boundaries and subversions of hegemonic rigidities previously mapped in precursor literary canons. Overall, the present study reaffirms the persistent value attached to literary canon of short story imaginative writing in Zimbabwe, which illuminates the claim that the country is a short story country and that the story-telling tradition is alive and well. The genre is reshaping itself for new times.

#### **6.4. Relevance to future research**

This study's discussion of the inclusion/ exclusion matrix of the novel/ short story dichotomy is not a mindless celebration of difference for its own sake. The concern for revisiting concepts of literary canon is not simply a perfunctory appraisal of some kind of monochrome literary homogeneity. The complex short story canon engenders vital issues of contemporary relevance in debating African literature. The complex canonical location reveals the underlying problem that our literary society is still structured in imperialistic dominance in which the experiences of minor generic types remain lacerated. This study challenges future

researchers not to gird themselves to defend the mainstream canon by developing sub-disciplinary formations meant to exclude the marginal literary artefacts such as the short story. The study, therefore, insists that the call for decolonisation of universities would not be complete if colonial imbalances still exist in African literary canon. Thus, when the literary canon sounds inadequate for the culture, canonising agents need to acknowledge and accept the limitations of what they selected. They should not be seduced to defending it.

This research holds that African literature is one of the veritable weapons at service to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as centre/ margin, us/ them, First world and third world, coloniser and colonised, and so on. The primary concern of any African writer, poet or dramatist should be to salvage the history of the African people that colonialism and neo-colonialism endeavour to dismantle. An Africanist critic occupies a central position in aiding the authors to critique the colonial portrayal of Africa and her people. This project stimulates future scholars and researchers to respond to the inevitability of the historic mission of putting the records straight thereby illuminating the threshold between the past and present, thought and action, self and other as well as Africa and the world.

The paucity of Shona and Ndebele short story corpus within the contemporary milieu (which seems to favour English language mediated short story discourse) challenges future researchers, writers and critics to come up with strategies to revamp and nurture it. Given the present state of our literature and the arts as marked by globalisation, the internet, porous borders and waning distinctions among disciplines and ideologies, the concept of the homogeneous national literary canon, however circumscribed, cannot easily be construed. As such, future researchers need to interrogate, within the Africultural confines, the challenges of dispersion, cosmopolitanism and self-selected cyber literary communities which are posing challenge to African theories anchored in the dominant triad of African culture, racial identity and language.

To end this nuanced study, what serves well as model for researches to follow is that literary canons are messy and fluid. Hence, the function of reception, consumption and strategic

critical positioning of the canon, of necessity, should be to reform and revolutionising it. The test cases for canonical reform needing and wanting to be explored are exponentially varied.

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## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PUBLISHERS

**Dear Respondent**

**Title:** *Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*

My name is Mbwera Shereck, a PhD Student with the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled “*Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*” I am conducting this research to find out the place of the short story genre within Zimbabwean literature. The research examines how the Zimbabwean literary canon, (mainstream literature as taught in schools) treats the short story genre vis-à-vis the novel. I kindly solicit your contribution by way of filling in this questionnaire. This questionnaire collects data based on the implications of canonisation of Zimbabwean literature, especially by the state controlled agents such as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, (SRLB) in order to determine the extent to which canonisation distorts art. The core is to determine how the marginalised short story genre evaded the threat of canonist extinction to retain a historical continuum for its existence. Your contribution, therefore, is of immense value to illuminate my search for reflection on the short story genre. Your information will be used strictly for the purposes of this research.

1. May you please give some reflections as to what Weaver Press is; its vision, publishing policies and future prospects, etc.?

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2. What challenges do you face as publishers with respect to the publication of short stories?

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3. What criteria do you use to select works of fiction for publication? Do you have guidelines as to how writers should use for their manuscripts to be accepted?

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4. The contemporary milieu (from the late 1990s) has witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of short story publication. What factors are attributable to this sudden upsurge of the genre?

5. What is the target readership for the short stories you publish? What roles do the school and other collegiate institutions play in determining your publication of fiction?

6. What can you say about the reading culture of the Zimbabweans? Do ordinary Zimbabweans readily fictional work out of their own volition or they ready for a purpose; to pass a course where novels and/ or short stories are prescribed?

7. The short story genre has also been considered the training ground/ apprenticeship of the much wieldier novel. How valid is this assertion?

8. What role did (do) state controlled Educational Agents/ Policies, (such as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau) play in influencing the production and consumption of Zimbabwean literature?

9. How does the state interfere with (or intervene in) your publishing policies? What do you benefit from the state as publishers? Does the state stand as censor? Please, would you explain your relationship with the state?

10. How do you motivate prospective writers to publish with you? Do you offer incentives? Do you consider literary prizes as a viable means of encouragement?

11. What do you consider to be the main reason why most local publishers fail to attract international writers to publish with them?

12. Some critics argue that publishers' guidelines and rules persuade writers to produce paternalistic work, (i.e. publishers encourage patronage; the desire to impress the publisher in order to publish force writers to write outside of themselves thereby producing what the publisher and not the readership anticipates.) How do you respond to these comments?

13. What is the future of Zimbabwean fiction? What comment can be made about the way Zimbabwean literature is heading?

14. What are the opportunities and/ or challenges you (as publisher) are experiencing as a result of globalisation and digitalisation?

15. Do you think self-publishing, online publishing or other emergent multimedia publishing options will produce writers or poets with the kind of profile and lasting stature as Mungoshi, Chinodya and Hove?

Has Weaver press gone digital in terms of publishing? How do you battle for international recognition?

16. What do you think can be done to circumvent challenges on self-publishing and online publication? I have in mind such challenges as lack of peer-reviewing, external editing and petty remittance.

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACADEMICS

**Dear Respondent**

**Title:** *Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*

My name is Mbwera Shereck, a PhD Student with the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled *“Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.”* I am conducting this research to find out the place of the short story genre within Zimbabwean literature. The research examines how the Zimbabwean literary canon treats the short story genre vis-à-vis the novel. I kindly solicit your contribution by way of filling in this questionnaire. This questionnaire collects data based on the implications of canonisation of Zimbabwean literature, especially by the state controlled agents such as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, (SRLB) in order to determine the extent to which canonisation distorts art. The core is to determine how the marginalised short story genre evaded the threat of canonist extinction to retain a historical continuum for its existence. Your contribution, therefore, is of immense value to illuminate my search for reflection on the short story genre. Your information will be used strictly for the purposes of this research.

I got your contact from your institution’s staff contact details. I assumed you could be knowledgeable about my research area and have, therefore, decided to send you this questionnaire. If you are comfortable with this, please, assist by way of completing this questionnaire. Please, do not be offended by my somewhat informal approach. I am driven by the need to get as many informants as possible. I hope you will bear with me.

1. Critics argue that the short story genre has received relatively scant scholarly attention compared to the novel. How do you validate this skewed stratification of the genre?

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2. The short story has often been relegated as trivial oral mass, art for art's sake, small literature, female and/ or children's literature. What is your perception of these comments?

3. The short story genre has also been considered the training ground/ apprenticeship of the much wieldier novel. What do you think?

4. In view of the unprecedented resurgence short story writing within the contemporary dispensation, (especially in the English medium) what reasons can be suggested for this rebirth?

5. Does this phenomenal upsurge of the short story spawn seismic shift or profound transformation in the orientation of Zimbabwean literature?

6. Could it not be an attempt by the genre to regain its contested terrain: re-oracisation of its de-oracised tradition in order to claim its own space within African literature?

7. Could it not be ideal to consider the short story as a stand-alone genre independent of the conventions of the novel?

8. Does your prose curriculum prescribe short stories? (Would you, please, be courteous enough to provide your course outline?)

9. How does your department value the short story genre in comparison to the novel?

10. Who prescribes what is literary for your department?

11. What criteria does the department use to determine the curricula of your prose literature?

12. What do you think obtains when a literary culture becomes canonical?

13. Do you think the decline (or exclusion) of the short story from the Zimbabwean literary canon is attributable to canonisation of literature by the colonial state controlled agents such as the Rhodesia Literature Bureau? Explain.

14. Is canonisation necessary for African/ Zimbabwean Literature? Explain your answer?

15. As a question for a way forward; how far have the stakeholders gone in changing colonial curricular in universities and other learning institutions, vis-à-vis the teaching of short stories? The content may have changed. We may have realised a shift from Europhile to Afro-centred theoretical approaches, but have the models really changed?

## APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WRITERS

Dear Respondent

**Title:** *Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*

My name is Mbwera Shereck, a PhD Student with the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled “*Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*” I am conducting this research to find out the place of the short story genre within Zimbabwean literature. The research examines how the Zimbabwean literary canon treats the short story genre vis-à-vis the novel. I kindly solicit your contribution by way of filling in this questionnaire. This questionnaire collects data based on the implications of canonisation of Zimbabwean literature, especially by the state controlled agents such as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, (SRLB) in order to determine the extent to which canonisation distorts art. The core is to determine how the marginalised short story genre evaded the threat of canonist extinction to retain a historical continuum for its existence. Your contribution, therefore, is of immense value to illuminate my search for reflection on the short story genre. Your information will be used strictly for the purposes of this research.

1. Most Zimbabwean writers prefer novel to short story writing. Do you write/ have you written short stories?

2. What is the motive of you writing or not writing short stories?

3. The short story has often been relegated as trivial oral mass, art for art's sake, small literature, female and/ or children's literature. What is your perception of these comments?



4. The short story genre has also been considered the training ground/ apprenticeship of the much popular novel. What do you think?

5. Most writers are now resorting to writing short stories courtesy online publication and the proliferation of such publications as AmaBook and Zimbabwe Women writers, among others. What role do publishers play in influencing your form?

6. Have you attended writer's courses? Have you been trained to write? If yes, which training institution trained you?

7. Do you write for a specific targeted readership? How does the readership influence the form, content of style of your writing?

8. To what extend do learning institutions; schools, colleges and/ or universities influence the way you write? Do you write with the focus of having your works prescribed/ canonised in these institutions?

9. What do you think obtains when a literary culture becomes canonical? What are the implications of writing to satisfy the tastes of such institutions as the publishers and the collegiate institutions?

10. Do you think the decline (or exclusion) of the short story from the Zimbabwean literary canon is attributable to canonisation of literature by the colonial state controlled agents such as the Rhodesia Literature Bureau? Explain.

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11. Is canonisation necessary for African/ Zimbabwean Literature? Explain your answer?

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12. What is your perception of the short story in terms of its place within Zimbabwean literature? Given that Zimbabwean people are story-tellers by nature, don't you think the genre deserve to be considered the primary narrative discourse ahead of the novel?

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## APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Dear Respondent

**Title:** *Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*

My name is Mbwera Shereck, a PhD Student with the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled “*Short stories for life: Implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition with special reference to selected Zimbabwean short stories.*” I am conducting this research to find out the place of the short story genre within Zimbabwean literature. The research examines how the Zimbabwean literary canon treats the short story genre vis-à-vis the novel. I kindly solicit your contribution by way of filling in this questionnaire. This questionnaire collects data based on the implications of canonisation of Zimbabwean literature, especially by the state controlled agents such as the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, (SRLB) in order to determine the extent to which canonisation distorts art. The core is to determine how the marginalised short story genre evaded the threat of canonist extinction to retain a historical continuum for its existence. Your contribution, therefore, is of immense value to illuminate my search for reflection on the short story genre. Your information will be used strictly for the purposes of this research.

1. Critics argue that the short story genre has received relatively scant scholarly attention compared to the novel. How do you validate this skewed stratification of the genre?

2. The short story has often been relegated as trivial oral mass, art for art's sake, small literature, female and/ or children's literature. What is your perception of these comments?

3. The short story genre has also been considered the training ground/ apprenticeship of the much wieldier novel. What do you think?

4. In view of the unprecedented resurgence short story writing within the contemporary dispensation, (especially in the English medium) what reasons can be suggested for this rebirth?

5. Does this phenomenal upsurge of the short story spawn seismic shift or profound transformation in the orientation of Zimbabwean literature?

6. Could it not be an attempt by the genre to regain its contested terrain: re-oracisation of its de-oracised tradition in order to claim its own space within African literature?

7. Could it not be ideal to consider the short story as a stand-alone genre independent of the conventions of the novel?

8. Does your prose curriculum prescribe short stories? (Would you, please, be courteous enough to provide your course outline?)

9. How does your department value the short story genre in comparison to the novel?

10. What criteria does the department use to determine the curricula of your prose literature?

11. What do you think obtains when a literary culture becomes canonical?

12. Do you think the decline (or exclusion) of the short story from the Zimbabwean literary canon is attributable to canonisation of literature by the colonial state controlled agents such as the Rhodesia Literature Bureau? Explain.

13. Is canonisation necessary for African/ Zimbabwean Literature? Explain your answer?

14. As a question for a way forward; how far have the stakeholders gone in changing colonial curricular in universities and other learning institutions, vis-à-vis the teaching of short stories? The content may have changed. We may have realised a shift from Europhile to Afro-centred theoretical approaches, but have the models really changed?

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviews were conducted to complement the questionnaire method. Interviewees were expected to participate by answering questions based on African literary canon and the short story genre. The interview questions are not structured, (questions would be asked as per the nature, context and field of participants' expertise.) However, the core questions are:

1. Is canonisation necessary for African/Zimbabwean Literature? Who canonises literature?
2. What obtains when a literary culture becomes canonical?
3. Does not the process of canonisation segregate authentic literary canons that culturally define a people's art? Comment in relation to the position of the African short story vis-à-vis Zimbabwean prose.
4. In view of the sudden resurgence of the short story in the recent years, can the genre be seen as a preparation for the writing of longer narrative, (the extended novel) or insolent to the novel tradition?
5. Does this phenomenal upsurge of the short story spawn seismic shift or profound transformation in the orientation of Zimbabwean literature?
6. It appears the recent proliferation of the genre is an attempt to regain its contested terrain: re-oracisation of its de-oracised tradition in order to claim its own space within African literature. How justifiable is this assertion?
7. Could it not be ideal to consider the short story as a stand-alone genre independent of the conventions of the novel?
8. Compared to the novel, critics seem to agree that the short story genre has received relatively scant attention. Can this skewed stratification be validated without risking sacrificing the merits of its superstructure?
9. As a question for a way forward; how far have the stakeholders gone in changing colonial curricular in universities and other learning institutions? The content may

have changed. We may have realised a shift from Europhile theoretical approaches (such as literary criticism) to Afro-centred approaches, but have the models really changed?

10. What factors are attributable to the decline (or exclusion) of the short story from the Zimbabwean literary canon?